

Yellow Card

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Yellow Card

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Summary

Simon Riley, captain of the Manchester Soldiers, is one of the best goal scorers in the entire premier league. For some reason, however, he cannot score a goal against John MacTavish to save his life. It's driving him a little mad at this point.

When John gets booted from his team for a "breach of contract" Simon does his best to be professional, to welcome his new goalie. That's what good captains do. It's just a shame MacTavish is such an arrogant prick.

Notes

I screamed in my friends dms for seven hours and this is the result. thanks markie!

Cw for this chapter/ mentions of homophobia

See the end of the work for more [notes](#)

See The Shot Coming

The smell of fresh grass, so potent John could taste it on his tongue, interlaced with the salty taste of his own sweat. The roar of the crowd. The slight dampness in his gloves. Strands of his mohawk, loosened from his hair gel by the heat and movement. It surrounded John, shrouded him like a blanket. He could hear his team mates further up the pitch, could hear them yelling and their boots digging into the neat turf.

A minute left of overtime. tied at one each.

Their striker was coming straight for him.

Simon Riley, Captain of the Manchester Soldiers. One of the best goal scorers in the entire league. Known for his precise passes and high speed scoring, and here he was, barrelling straight towards John with a look of burning, fierce determination. A fire that, if John was a weaker man, would make him combust on the spot. Riley had scored against every goalie in the league. Except one.

For some reason, the blond striker couldn't get a single ball past John, and John knew that it drove him mad. John wondered if Riley stayed up late at night, thinking about how to get one past him.

But John could read him. Could read the pass to Garrick, the other center forward, before it even happened. Knew that Garrick wouldn't go for the score, not from his current angle. His only option was to pass it back to Riley.

It was a blur, Garrick passing the ball between the legs of one of John's defenders to Riley, who made to kick it bottom left. It was a fake, an obvious one that no one but John would have been able to pick up on. So he went top right, launched himself before the ball had even left Riley's boot.

The home crowd, a sea of white, let out a thunderous roar as John felt the ball connect with the palm of his glove. Tidal waves crashing against jagged rocks that drowned out the final whistle.

Simon Riley was pissed. John could tell from here. That same fiery expression had gone cold, a glare that could turn John to stone if he kept it up.

"Better luck next time, Aye Captain?" John jeered. He's still holding the ball, tucked up against his arm and his hip. Riley stormed off, Crossing the pitch in long strides to the coach's bench. Garrick looks as if he is going to follow, but stops and turns to John.

"Feels like a crime to say it, but beautiful save mate" and then he's jogging to Catch up with his Captain.

—

In the locker room, the team is placid. In the stall next to him, John could see Declan on his phone. Occasionally, the Irishman would scoff at something, or mutter a "fuck off" under his breathe. Probably scrolling through twitter again, getting too caught up on what the pundits had to say about their defence this game, and what it meant for their overall chances. A tie is great, but they needed the win. John was scrubbing at his boots, a post game routine so ingrained in the locker room that his teammates knew to leave him alone.

His coach, however, had other plans.

"MacTavish, My office, Now!"

The entire locker room froze, and John, without looking up, knew that he would have almost two dozen pairs of eyes staring directly at him. Coach never yelled. Not in post-game at least, only in warm ups and drills when his teammates were slacking in the endurance training. John put his gear to the side, and stood, following the Coach into the office just to the side of the locker room. When he entered, his heart sank.

The three coaches, the director of football, and the team manager were waiting for him. Each of them in their branded jackets or fancy suits and thousand-dollar haircuts. His head coach wordlessly gestured to the empty chair in front of the desk, so he sat. God, he was still only wearing his socks

"What's this about?"

"We received some news we needed to discuss with you." The manager said, a balding man, that John wasn't too fond of. "Take a look." He gestured to the laptop on the desk, which had been facing away from Johnny when he came in. One of the coaches, Mark, turned it around.

It was a photo of himself, stepping out of the cab. The image was

slightly blurry, given that it was taken at night and from, Johnny would have guessed, a long distance away. The street in the background looked familiar. Liverpool? That would make it a few weeks old then. The coach pressed a key on the laptop, and this time the image was replaced by a second one. This time, the John in the image is joined by a second person, a man. If John thought hard enough, he could remember his name. Sam, Seth? S-something, But he worked in construction, and was a semi-decent lay, once you got over the british accent and calloused hands.

The third image had Johnny's stomach in his throat. He remembered now. Remembered how S-something had pulled him in by the Scottish flag scarf his ma had knitted him and kissed him in the middle of the street.

The final image. S-something whispering into John's ear, A promise of a good time, of a quick fuck? He couldn't remember. Instead, all John could focus on was S-something's eyes as they stared directly into the camera, with a knowing smirk.

Fuck. John thought.

"Fuck."

"Our thoughts exactly. Now. Is there anything you can say for yourself? This sort of thing ruins a club's reputation"

And isn't that a slap to the face. John sat there, still staring directly at S-something's eyes, which seemed to be staring directly back to him

"We're buying out your contract. Today was your last game with us"

"Bullshit, You Cannae do that!" And John is on his feet, met with the five stone faced individuals. "You cannae just get rid of me because I kissed some bloke"

"Actually, we can," The director of football replied. He was in a pinstriped suit, John noted, it looked hideous on him. "You voided the terms of your contract"

"How the fuck is me giving this guy a smourich a 'breach of contract'?!" And John was yelling now, unable to restrain his anger. He knew where this was going. Knew there was nothing he could do to stop it. Suddenly, he was four years old with his first grazed knee.

"You failed to uphold the club's expectations of decency in public"

pinstripe suit replied. "We have the grounds to completely tear up your contract now. It's only because of your contributions to the team that we've decided to buy you out instead. Plus-" he pauses, gesturing to the laptop. "-We already contacted the photographer, he's agreed to selling them to us, for the sake of your reputation, as well as ours"

With that, the director of football closes the laptop, and he and the manager exit the room. Leaving John, still wearing socks and no shoes, in the office with his three now former coaches.

"Soap-"

"Don't call me that. Only teammates get to call me that"

His coach sighed. "Right. John. We're sorry. There's nothing we could do."

John scoffs at that. He could think of plenty that the coaching team could do. "So that's it? I'm done?"

"With us? Yes, but we can pull some strings if you want, see if any teams want a new goalie?"

"That's not necessary," John replied. He stands, turns on his feet, a motion made easier with his lack of shoes, and walks back to the locker room.

As soon as he steps in, he can feel everyone's eyes on him. Can feel the way they stare out of pity. No one likes being called into the coach's office. He looks at his locker, thankful that he left most of his personal items in his car. He picks up his boots, his keys, and his metal water bottle, tosses them all into his gear bag. And storms out.

His game worn jersey, still streaked with dirt, on the floor where he dropped it.

Post Game Press

Chapter Summary

Simon loved playing football. Loved the feeling of flight he gets running across the manicured pitch. Of teammates shouting for a pass. The feeling of Scoring goals, knowing that he had achieved something. The feeling of being lifted as the crowd chanted his name. He even, though he wouldn't admit it, loved the team that Price had built, the team that he'd chosen Simon to lead. Football was everything to him. He loved everything about it

Except the press.

Chapter Notes

Is this a ted lasso au? No. But it is inspired by ted Lasso, in the sense that I, an Australian, Now care ALOT about English football.

Fun fact for this chapter, Soap's original team are called the wanderers because thats the name of my fiance's team when he was like ten. They were not very good.

Cw/ Very brief mention of a minor character death (Simon's dad)

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Simon loved playing football. Loved the feeling of flight he gets running across the manicured pitch. Of teammates shouting for a pass. The feeling of Scoring goals, knowing that he had achieved something. The feeling of being lifted as the crowd chanted his name. He even, though he wouldn't admit it, loved the team that Price had built, the team that he'd chosen Simon to lead. Football was everything to him. He loved everything about it

Everything except for the press.

Being Captain of the Soldiers meant he got pulled into the post-game interviews often, forced to sit behind that slightly wobbly table in front of the branded backdrop and answer the same questions again and again. He was hyper aware of his motions, knew that one slip up would be analysed by the pundits and couch coaches like he was a specimen under a microscope.

He cracked open the water bottle to his left, and took a sip. Three seconds, any longer and the pundits would say he was stalling. He swallowed. "Alright. Who's up first?"

The sea of reporters all raised their hands, each eager to ask their own totally unique, non-repetitive question that had definitely never been asked before. In his peripheral vision, he saw Price point towards someone, a man in a navy suit.

"Greg Jones, the Guardian. Question for Simon; This is now the seventh game in a row you've faced up against John MacTavish and been unable to score. What do you think is the cause of this dry spell?"

It was actually the eighth, but Simon wasn't going to correct him. He spared a glance to Price, who only shrugged. Looked like he was on his own for this one.

"MacTavish is..." he pauses, searching for the correct word, pushing down his gut instinct that was telling him to call the Scotsman an 'arrogant prick' "I haven't figured him out yet to be honest. There's something he's doing that we haven't been able to replicate in practice." He pauses again, thinks about what to say next so that it doesn't sound like he's throwing his own team under the bus. "There's a weakness in my own scoring that none of us have figured out, but MacTavish coaches seem to. Once we figure out what that is, I can work on eliminating it. Until then, I just need to examine my own scoring more"

"But against other goalkeepers your scoring is fantastic, what is it about MacTavish specifically that you're struggling with?"

"Like I said" Simon replies, pulling the short microphone stand closer to him. "I don't know yet. Once I figure it out, I can work on it." He leans back in his chair, doing his best to make his body language seem relaxed. Non-threatening. "Now, any other questions?"

There were less arms raised this time, as though Greg had stolen the question on everyone else's mind. Simon pointed to a woman in the back row wearing a yellow blazer. "Question for the coach. Any Update on when we can expect to see Keller back on the goals"

Alex Keller was their own goalkeeper. Simon thought he was the best in the league, others placed him in second behind MacTavish (a fact that had Simon fuming when Tommy had shown him the list on twitter). Alex had taken an awful collision at the start of their season, a knee injury so bad that Simon and Gaz had had to essentially carry

him off. It wasn't official, but it was unlikely he'd return for the season, if at all. They were currently working with their only backup goalie, who was good, but not fantastic. He didn't have the stamina for extended overtimes and, in Simon's opinion, wasn't mentally ready for premier level football.

Simon had to admire Price's poker face. "At this stage he's making good progress. Our last update was that the surgery went well, but the rehabilitation, according to our doctors, is lengthy."

The selfish part of Simon wanted to use that as an excuse for his issue scoring against MacTavish. If he can't train and practise with a keeper like Keller, he's unlikely to score against a keeper like MacTavish.

"Does that mean you are still looking for a replacement?"

"We're keeping our eyes peeled, but right now our priorities are focusing on our defence line, and pushing our midfield"

The rest of the interview passed with nothing of note, except for Simon putting his water bottle on the floor, and Price immediately kicking it over by accident.

By the time Simon and Price had climbed onto the bus, most of his teammates were asleep, or messing around on their phones. Gaz, who normally took the seat across the aisle from Simon, was scrolling through Instagram. Occasionally he would turn his phone over to show Simon a photo of a meme he thought Simon would like, or a photo of a dog wearing a Soldier's jersey.

Simon pulled out his own phone, seeing that he'd been flooded by messages by his family group chat. It was a new thing; their family therapist had suggested it as a way of 'expanding positive communication' but it was mainly used by Tommy to show Simon and their mother pictures of Joseph playing in his under 8s football. Simon wished he could go watch more of his games, but between practice and travelling for his own, it didn't leave him much time. Not that Joseph seemed to mind. He got the bragging rights of an uncle being a professional footballer.

What did upset Simon, however, was the fact that Joseph didn't consider Simon his favourite player. Normally that wouldn't bother Simon too much. He knew that Joseph loved him as an uncle, knew that he would run and leap into his arms for a hug at every opportunity. Simon could cope with not being his nephew's favourite player. What he couldn't cope with was the fact that his six-year-old

nephew considered John fucking MacTavish to be the best footballer to ever live. Joseph had asked for a MacTavish jersey for Christmas last year, saying that he was going to be a professional goalie, just like MacTavish, when he grew up.

Simon was not jealous. Not even a bit

He looked back down at his phone to see the wall of messages Tommy had sent, the first was several hours ago, around the time the match had started. It was a photo, Joseph sitting in front of the tv at their mother's house, wearing that god forsaken MacTavish jersey.

Tommy

> Good luck Si, I'm rooting for you. Even if Jo isn't.

> great tackle against that big lad.

> Tell Chuy he needs to stop going for dives or he's going to get carded.

The messages went on for the entire ninety minutes, Tommy giving Simon a play by play of commentary that he knew Simon read after the game. Normally Simon ignored the couch commentators, but he'd always make an exception for his little brother. The last one, sent at the end of the match, had Simon letting out a snort.

Tommy

> How the fuck did MacTavish read that fake? I'm starting to side with Joseph on this one. Man's good.

Simon

> I'm guessing you both liked the game then?

The reply was almost instant.

Tommy

> Wasn't your best, but you know that by now. Joseph was hoping for a win.

> You still coming round tomorrow for dinner? Mum's teaching Joseph that Chicken and sauce thing she used to make?

Simon

> I'll make an effort. The one with that red sauce?

Tommy

> Yeah, said she was going to use tomatoes from her garden. Jo's mad

keen for it.

Simon smiled, picturing his nephew and mother harvesting the vegetables from his mother's flourishing vegetable garden. After their father had died, he'd expected his mother to spiral from the change, but he had been surprised. The newfound freedom she experienced meant that she had time for her own hobbies, such as gardening, and cooking. It meant that Beth and Tommy felt comfortable bringing Joseph around, even leaving him with her when they needed a babysitter. They were all better off because of it.

Simon was pulled out of his reminiscing by another text from Tommy. A link to the Guardian, written by the same guy from the presser earlier.

Tommy

> DID YOU SEE THIS?

The link for the article was slow to load on his phone, but once the headline loaded, and Simon had exited out of the six pop ups that filled his screen, he had to hold his phone tighter to avoid dropping it into his lap. In bold lettering, across the top of the page. "MacTavish to leave Wanderers"

Fresh off a tied game against the Manchester Soldiers, the Sheffield Wanderers have announced that they are parting ways with goalkeeper John MacTavish. Announced in a sudden press conference this afternoon, and followed up with a social media post, the director of football stated that 'John requested the move, saying he wanted a change of scenery. Because of all the dedication he had shown the club, we felt obliged to allow this move.' Head coach Mark Summers followed up by stating "We don't know what John has plans for next, but we wish him all the best, and thank him for his loyalty and service to the club"

John MacTavish has served with the Wanderers since his debut five years ago, where he entered the league and then proceeded to have a twelve-game shutout. He is widely regarded as one of the best goalkeepers in the league right now, with many experts stating that John's absence will be felt throughout Sheffield.

John MacTavish was unavailable for comment at this time.

Simon could hear the murmuring of teammates, could hear Price and Laswell, a few seats behind him, engaging in a hurried, but whispered conversation. He couldn't make out the words they were saying, but also knew that he had an inkling of what they were discussing.

When the bus pulled up to their own facility, He reached over to shake Gaz, who at some point abandoned his switch in favour of noise cancelling headphones and a sleep mask, awake. After the team stumbled off the bus and made their way to their own rides, he felt Price saddle up to him. "Got a minute before you head off? I want to discuss something with you?"

Simon nodded, following Price and Laswell inside the facility to the meeting room.

"Did you hear about MacTavish?" Price asked.

"I did, I assume you're considering it?"

"Taking Him on? If he's interested, we'll look into it. I want your input on it though?" Price said, sitting in his plush desk chair.

"Why?" Simon asked "If you're considering it, why are you asking me?"

"Because this is your locker room Simon. You know it best. How do you think someone like MacTavish would fit in?" As Price is speaking, he reaches into his desk drawer and pulls out a cigar. It's a mid-shelf brand, Simon realises, not one of his fancy ones. "Besides, I'm not stupid, I know you don't like the guy?"

Simon shrugged, suddenly very interested in the pattern on the carpet, how it almost matches his boots. "I have no idea how he'd go in the locker room. My only impression of him is that he's a loud-mouthed prick." He pauses, looking at the whiteboard where their latest defence strategies were marked out with magnets and whiteboard markers. "But he would be a benefit to us. What with Alex being injured"

"I agree, " Laswell says, leaving against Price's desk with her arms folded over her chest. "But if we offer him a temporary contract, there's no guarantee he'd take it. It would need to be at least two years"

Simon considered that for a moment. "That's true. But since he left so suddenly, he might be willing to be negotiated with"

“That is a fair point. Laswell, do you think we can do it?”

Laswell sighed, her expression hardening. Simon had known her long enough to know she was thinking, running logistics and numbers and scenarios in her head. “It’s an option” She answered, after about fifteen seconds. “I say we go for it. If he ends up being a- what did you call him Simon? - an arrogant prick, then we can work with that. Right now though, the benefits outweigh the potential losses.”

Simon nods, and out of the corner of his eye sees Price do the same. “Right then, it’s settled. I’ll make some calls. Laswell, you good to stick around for negotiation?” When Laswell nods, Price turns to Simon “You go home lad. We’ll keep you posted.”

Simon nods, turns, and walks out of the office. As he does, he’s already pulling out his phone to message Tommy

Simon

> How’s Joseph taking the news?

Tommy

> Like a widow in mourning. Nothing a visit from uncle Simon can’t fix. I’ll see you tomorrow?

Simon sends a thumbs up in reply, before getting into his own car and driving home.

The next night, while he’s eating the meal his mother and Joseph made together (it was pretty good, he had to admit) he got a message from Price. seven words, sent four minutes after seven thirty pm.

Price

> He’ll be at practice tomorrow. Play Nice.

Chapter End Notes

I made Simon's family alive for this because he deserves to be happy, and I'm a sucker for all things domestic. Plus, the idea of Joseph preferring Johnny over Simon, his actual uncle, is hilarious to me.

Also- I still haven't decided on a name for Simon's mum. If you have any ideas, pls let me know

Also, feel free to follow me on twitter at <https://twitter.com/SkezzaB>

Touch Line

Chapter Summary

John figures out his next move.

Chapter Notes

I don't think theres any content warnings for this chapter. If you can think of anything shoot me a dm on twitter and I'll add it here.

I wrote most of this chapter while home sick with the flu, so apologies if it's not great. I might come back and edit at a later date.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

John had thought he was going to stay with the Wanderers until he retired. Until his knees or ankles gave out and his mohawk had gone grey. And now, here he was, on twitter, reading the social media post about how he had “requested to leave”. What a load of bullshit.

He'd been stoic in the locker room, and on the drive home. It wasn't until he made it into his house, closed the front door, that he let it affect him.

His mother had been his first call. She listened to him rant and scream and sob over the whole situation. "It isnae fair" She had said, her accent so thick and warm and comforting that John found himself homesick. She'd comforted him while he paced around his flat. Had asked him what he wanted to do now.

"I still wanna play ma, it's all I want to do."

"So you'll play then" She had responded, as if she was talking about the weather. "You dinnae need me to tell you how good you are John. You'll find a team. One that actually wants you"

"You don't know that"

"Yes I do lad. I'm your mother. I'm never wrong"

Of course. She had been right. His emails had been flooded with team offering him positions, tryouts, million-dollar contracts. It was

overwhelming. He'd officially had to boot up the laptop he'd bought for 'admin' months ago, as it became too much for him to handle just on his phone.

Most of the contracts were ludicrous. They were demanding. Two managers had even sent him fully written contracts, saying all he needed to do was sign them and he'd be one of them.

One stood out though. JohnPrice@ManSoldiersFC.com. No flashy contract, No insane promises. Just the subject line 'Call when you get a minute'. The body of the email was equally vague, containing a phone number, and a skype username.

John looked up at the window closest to him. The darkness outside made the perfect mirror to see his dishevelled appearance. He looked as if he'd played a full ninety with no breaks. Phone call it was then.

John checked the number three times before he pressed the dial button. The last thing he needed was some random person having his private phone number. Another breach of privacy that made his skin crawl.

Deep breath in. Deep breath out. Best case scenario, John had a team that wanted him, a team that let him play football the way he wanted. Worst case scenario, He got to have a phone call with the legendary John Price.

Price was a legend in the League. He'd played for almost twenty years. Kids like John had grown up with his poster on their bedroom walls. Had dressed up as him, had worn his name across their backs and pretended to be him.

And Now John had his phone number. Was calling him at 6:45pm.

"Good evening, John speaking." His voice had a slight crackle but overall smoothness to it, like a caramel brittle.

MacTavish cleared his throat. "Hi John. It's John here... John MacTavish"

"Oh MacTavish. Good to hear from you." There was a rustling in the background, as Price had stood up. "How are you doing? I can imagine you haven't had the most relaxing of afternoons."

John snorted at that, thinking distantly of three hours ago, when he'd been crying on the phone to his mother like a child. "It's been a wee

bit hectic, yeah. Probably more eventful than yours”

“That’s probably true. Now, it’s late, I’ll cut to the chase so I don’t waste your time. I think you’d be a good fit in Manchester. Obviously, it’s probably not your first choice-”

“Says who?”

“I’m sorry?” Price sounds confused.

“Who says that you’re not my first choice?”

“Are we?”

John paused at that, considering the question. Who was his first choice? Did he have one? His first choice had been Sheffield, and look where that had gotten him. After a moment of silence, Price spoke again.

“I’ve been in this game for a while, so is it alright if I ask you a few questions? About your departure from Sheffield?”

John nodded, before remembering that this was a phone call. “Go ahead.”

“Their wording said that it was a mutual choice. It wasn’t, was it?”

“No Sir.” John answered, suddenly feeling a lump rise in his throat. Thinking about those images. Of the knowing gaze the guy had made directly to the camera.

“I thought so. Them or you?”

“I don’t think I understand the question there John” MacTavish replied

“Call me Price. Let me rephrase. Was it your choice to leave, or did they force you out?”

“How did you know?”

“Like I said son, I’ve been in the game long enough. I can smell PR bullshit from a mile away. How about this? What happened? Why did they let you go?”

Part of him wanted to be honest. Wanted to let it all out to Price like he'd done hours earlier with his mother. But Price had said so himself,

he'd been in the game a long time. He'd been the face of the league. Instead of doing what he wanted to, he said nothing.

Price also paused, let the silence between them draw on for what felt like an eternity to John.

"Okay, what about this? When you found out, how did you feel?"

That question took John by surprise. He hadn't had a coach ask about his feelings since he was a child. He couldn't help but answer honestly. "Scared"

"I see. And how do you feel now?"

"Like I'm in a therapist session. Is that why you called me?"

"No, I'm just trying to get a read on you. Do you want to be a soldier?"

"No Sir, I want to play football." He joked

Price laughed at that, a gruff chuckle that had Johnny thinking about his father. "You're funny. I'm serious though. Name your terms. Six months, four years. Anything in between."

"Wait, you're letting me choose the terms of the contract?"

"You're a grown adult. Besides, if it's something we can't do. Laswell here will shut us down, right Kate?"

A second, more feminine voice enters the call. "That's right"

"What about Keller?" John asked, "You don't need me if you've got him."

"That's complicated," Laswell responded. "We don't know how long his rehab will be. It could be at least a year until he is in the box again."

"So you do need me?" John asked.

"Yes," Price answered. "But don't get it twisted, we also want you. We think you'll be a good fit for the locker room. For this team."

"Can I think about it and call you back?"

"Of course, I'm sure you've got other phone calls to make. Shoot me a text or a call when you have an answer for me, and we'll arrange

transport and accommodation for you.

“Will do, and thank you”

“No problem kid. I hope to hear from you soon. And then the phone went quiet. John looked at the clock on the screen. Less than ten minutes had passed since he first dialled the number.

John didn't know what to do. So he did the same thing he did three hours earlier, and phoned the only number he had completely memorised.

“Hey Ma, I need your opinion on something...”

It was thirty minutes later when Price's phone lit up.

John M

> I'm in. One year. Whatever the average salary for your team is, and I don't share a hotel room on away games. When can I start?

Price smiled, turning the phone to show Laswell.

Price

> How soon can you get to Manchester?

The reply was almost instant.

John M

> five hours.

Price

> think you'd be up for training at ten am?

John M

> Always.

> Thank you for this opportunity. I won't let you down Sir.

Price

> It's a pleasure. We'll talk tomorrow.

> Welcome to the team.

—

Price had said training started at 10, but John didn't have anywhere to be, so he pulled up into the Soldier's facility just before seven. He wasn't surprised to see a few cars in the car park, a couple of modest, but high-quality vehicles. Fucking Footballers.

The locker room was empty when John eventually found his way inside. A single gear bag thrown haphazardly onto one of the benches was the only sign of life. That, and the wide glass window that peeked into the coach's office. He could see Price sitting at his desk. John knocked on the glass, offering the older man a very slight, definitely awkward half wave.

Price smiled when he saw him, a wide grin that showed off the creases in his face. He waved John in, and John entered the office. For a moment, he was taken back to the last time he was summoned in the coach's office. He couldn't help but eye the laptop on Price's desk with a slight suspicion, almost wondering what life ruining evidence it hid from him.

After a very boring discussion about logistics and contracts and numbers that John didn't remember most of, and a very heavy pen in his hand. It was official. John was officially a Manchester Soldier. John traced the indent of the pen on the page in front of him where he had signed his signature definitely with his finger. It was real. This wasn't a dream.

"I'll give you a tour" John said, glancing down at his watch, "Most of the others don't get in for another hour or so."

John followed Price around the facility. His last facility had hallways of rooms that were empty, or had a purpose that was never explained to John. Here however, the rooms were crammed together with efficiency to have less of a physical footprint. Each room had a clear, logical connection. For example, the weights room was connected to the main showers room, which was connected to the main locker room. It made navigation easier than John had expected. He theorised that he would have managed without a tour.

But what the facility lacked in physical space; it made up for with its pitch. John gasped the first time he saw it. Perfect grass, the surface of it still blanketed in a slight morning dew. It was perfectly even, not a blade out of place, and the lines were crisp. Even the goals were perfect, each thread of the net in pristine condition.

There was a single figure already on the pitch. He was tall, John could tell as much, he was wearing standard Manchester shorts, with a black hoodie covering the rest of his figure, shrouding his identity from John. Mystery runner was making good pace, helped by his long gait that lengthened his strides. He was probably a striker, given the strength John could see in his calves. He hadn't noticed him and Price

yet, it looked, based on the fact that he'd made no change of pace. It wasn't until Price let out a piercing, fingers in mouth whistle that the runner paused. He looked towards John and Price, and continued jogging over. His hood dropped halfway, and John was met with a cluster of blond waves.

In hindsight, John should have known it was Riley. What other footballer would show up three hours early to practise just to run laps?

"Simon, this is John MacTavish" John said, once Simon was within earshot. "John, this is Simon"

"We've met" John replies "Nice to be officially introduced though." He stuck his hand out, annoyed that, at this distance, he had to look up to meet Simon's piercing gaze.

Simon just stared down at him, his eyes shifting from John's face to his outstretched hand.

"So how long are you here for?" Simon asked, barely making an effort to hide the coldness in his tone.

"Contract is for a year. Then it's up for negotiation" Price answered. John's hand was still outstretched, he realised. He looked down at it, before shoving it into his pocket.

"Right" Simon replied. John watched as the blond man turned to look at Price. Price stared back at Simon, narrowing his eyes slightly. John suddenly felt as if he was eavesdropping on a silent conversation.

"I'm gonna get ma boots on and warm up, " John said, pointing a thumb towards the locker room.

"Sounds like a good idea MacTavish, I'll have you run some drills when you get out, see what Simon can throw at you"

"Haven't you heard?" John replied, feeling the start of a smirk on his face. "I can take whatever *Simon* throws at me."

Simon glared at John, clenched his jaw so hard that John swore he could hear teeth grinding.

John turned, mainly to get geared up, but mostly to avoid looking at the caramelised honey brown of Simon's eyes, laced with an anger that John knew was directed at him, and framed by almost silver

eyelashes. He had to admit it, But Simon was handsome. He had the kind of face that PR teams loved, knew that he'd probably be centre stage on any press photos. It was a shame that John had only ever seen him with an angry expression, a stone hard glare. He'd never seen the Brit laugh, or smile. This was a new experience. In all his years of football, he'd never been hated by his captain before.

He was in for a long year.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading!

Simon is such a bitch good for him

Follow me on twitter [here!](#)

Middle Block

Chapter Notes

Quote from my fiance while writing this chapter. “A goalie is a goalie is a goalie is a goalie”

He also at some point pulled up a map of a pitch and pointed to it ala that guy pointing at a conspiracy board. I took very little of it in.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Normally, Simon trusted Price. Knew that Price was always going to do the right thing when it came to the players on his team. He had a level of respect that Simon didn't have for many other elders. Hell, some days he trusted Price more than his own mother. Today was an exception.

As soon as MacTavish had jogged out of earshot, Simon turned to his coach. “Are you still sure about this?”

“He fills our needs. He has a good record. The press loves him. Fans will like him too, when we announce it” Price answered.

“But he might not fit in with the locker room”

“You know what would help with that?” Price asked, turning to glare at Simon “You not acting like a bastard. I know you don't like change, Simon, but don't take it out on him.”

“Do you at least know why his other team dropped him?” Simon could feel himself getting desperate now. He needed Price to see that this was a terrible idea. That this would damage the team, Their team. His team. in the long run. “Did he tell you?”

Price exhaled, deeply. Simon could tell he'd struck a nerve. “No, he didn't. I didn't push him though”

“So you have no idea?”

“I know he got fucked over. That's good enough for me. If you trust me as your coach, that should be good enough for you too.”

The finality of Price's sentence was reinforced by the sounds of boots

on grass, Johnny jogging back to meet them where they stood, a metre or so away from the penalty arc. He was dribbling a ball as he went, kicking it with the side of his boot and then jogging to catch it. His footwork was good, more like a full back than a goalie. Maybe he had played defence in a previous team?

He was wearing a practice jersey for the Soldiers. Price must have given it to him during their meeting. The worst part, Simon noted, was that it *suit*ed him. The sleeve cupped his biceps nicely, the fabric on his chest stretched almost a little too much, the muscle underneath rippling as he moved. When John turned around, MACTAVISH arched across the shoulders in neat block lettering. He looked good. Simon hated it. He looked towards his coach, tearing himself away from looking at MacTavish for any longer than he needed to. "So, what do you want us to work on?"

Price walked up to Simon, clipboard in hand. He raised it so that it covered his mouth, as if this was an actual game and he was preventing having his lips read. "Go for these ones. It's up to you if you want to project your shots or fake him out. We need to figure out *what* you're doing that John is picking up on."

He lowered the clipboard to show it to Simon. On it was a series of hurriedly drawn rectangles in a row. Price had even drawn a little stick figure, which Simon assumed was supposed to be MacTavish. On each one was a red x. The first three were top right, then it spiralled around seemingly random locations.

Simon spent a moment longer memorising them, planning out the movements. He looked up at the goal, visualising the ball hitting the back net. John was leaning against the left post, stretching out his hamstring.

"MacTavish, you ready?" Simon called out.

John stopped his stretches. He jumped twice; high leaps that showed off just how much strength he had in his legs. He moved himself into the centre of the goal, and gave Simon a double thumbs up.

The first one was a simple standard shot that John should easily block. Which he did. He looked up at Simon with an arched brow, a look somewhere between 'are you joking' and 'you're having a fucking laugh'

He then proceeded to block the following nine. Simon attempted to fake him out, to kick finesse and instep shots, but none of them were

successful. At some point, he even had Price set him up for a bicycle kick, which, frustratingly, John was able to catch directly to the centre of his body. Each time, he looked up at Simon with a smarmy smirk. Prick.

This continued for almost an hour, the irritating combination of kicks. catch. Kick again. Catch again. By the end of it, Simon wanted to scream. His last kick hadn't even been close, had dinked off the crossbar.

"Alright. That's enough." Price called out. "Rest of the team will get here soon. Simon, good job with accuracy. Every single shot went exactly where I said-"

"But it didn't go in" Simon interrupted.

"That is fine" Price said, that authoritative finality returning to his voice. "John, what can you tell me about what you saw?"

John was still stood in the centre net, hands at his hips. "That last shot came as a surprise" he smirked as he said it, and Simon wanted to wipe that smirk off the Scottish prick's face. Instead, he turned, choosing instead to do the deep breathing technique his family therapist had shown him.

-

He could handle having an irritating bastard for a teammate, had grown up in locker rooms surrounded by bastards.

The fact that he was alone in the sentiment was *incredibly* frustrating. Price had told the team about John's signing earlier that morning, sending them a photo of John holding his signed contract, like a child posing with their first merit certificate from school. Gaz had immediately responded with a 'LETS FUCKING GOOOO' followed by a several emojis of a dancing woman.

Even now, in the locker room, Simon could tell that the others were glad to have him. Gaz had immediately taken John under his wing, slinging an arm over his shoulder and pulled him towards the cubby next to him that had been empty for a while, since Alex had been injured.

Gaz had even been able to score against him. A filthy backheel shot that had the rest of the team cheering from where they were spectating. Even Chuy, their defensive midfielder that had taken months to warm up to the team when he had arrived, was laughing

along with the others over something the Scott had said.

Simon realised it was stupid, knew that it was unprofessional, knew that he had no reason to resent this guy inside the locker room, especially now that they were on the same team.

Distantly, he could hear Gaz and John talking, could hear Gaz introducing John to the dynamics of the room. It strikes him that as captain, that was his responsibility, But Gaz took to it like a duck to a pond. His phone buzzed in his pocket. Lifting it out, he saw a text from Tommy. A link to a twitter thread from some Football pundit.

@ AllenDexterJournalist

Inside Source claims that John MacTavish spotted this morning training with Manchester Soldiers, days after parting ways with Wanderers.

The text was almost instant

Tommy

> if this is true you're legally obligated to tell me.

Simon

> I don't think I am actually

Tommy

> Si man, I'm BEGGING you. Joseph will go fucking MENTAL.

Simon laughed at his brother's desperation, could picture him tearing his hair out.

"Okay, so. When the captain gets that look on his face, he's texting his family. He gets grumpy if you interrupt him."

Simon lifted his hand to give Gaz a two-finger salute, not even looking up from his phone. He stood, and made his way to the office where Price and Laswell were talking.

"Twitter knows about MacTavish" he said, showing Price the tweet. "Planning on making it official?"

"Already have our press release" Laswell replied, tapping away at her phone. "Going to use a photo from practice."

Laswell turned her own phone to Simon, showing him the photo of choice. It was taken from behind the net, Showed John in the navy practice jersey, his surname spelt out in the familiar font. Simon

hadn't even noticed it being taken, which was weird considering he was in it. Out of focus, Leg still extended from the kick, cross bar, that Simon had faked to go bottom right. John had read him immediately, again, and had gone straight up to catch it.

@ManchesterSoldiersFC

Hailing from the highlands, we're pleased to welcome John MacTavish to the Manchester Soldiers!

@Initforthegame

Literally crying over MacTavish going to Manchester Rn. I had tickets to see them next week.

@FutballnotFootball

MacTavish to Manchester is a great choice. You gotta wonder what negotiations they offered to make it happen so quickly considering they were playing against each other three days ago.

@AllenDexterJournalist

Rumours are true! But how did this happen? Read my analysis. Plus, what other teams were vying for the Star Goalie? here: bit.ly/AllenDexter

@CleanHeartsCleanGoals

Price got so sick of Riley not scoring on MacTavish that he recruited him to the team? Wake up babes new level of petty just dropped

@Stephanienotstefany

Just remembered that the Soldiers put their goalie in either white (sexy) or very very light blue (even sexier) and am suddenly very excited to See MacTavish running around and getting all sweaty

@ManSolforLife

Price signing MacTavish and training him with Riley has the same energy of my ma organising playdates with the kids that I hated in an effort to make us get along. It never worked.

@MSFCtillIDie

**Price, slapping the roof of the Manchester Soldier's locker room* This bad boy can fit so many himbos in it.*

John liked these guys, he'd decided. Garrick "Mate, call me Gaz" had pretty much taken him under his wing, explained the politics of the room to him, and pulled him to a headlock to ruffle his mohawk. He'd even picked up on Simon's general pissiness towards John, and had reassured him that it was just the way he was with new guys, and "You'll be trading friendship bracelets in no time, don't worry about it mate."

He was still learning names, struggling to make connections between the names printed on the backs of shirts, and the variety of nicknames the team seemed to enjoy giving each other.

"Did you never have a nickname at your other team?" Gaz had asked, after John had wondered why the Guy named Kyle was called Gaz, while the Guy named Gary was named Roach.

"Aye, they used to call me Soap," John replied, almost instinctively wincing.

"What the hell kind of name is Soap?" Price had asked.

John gestured to the boots he was wearing, a bright crimson that were as clean as the day he bought them. "I clean my gear before and after every game. Have since I was a wee bairn."

Gaz's expression, as far as John can tell, is a combination of shock and impress. "What? Every game?"

John nods.

"How long does it take?"

"Depends on if it rains before the game. Ten minutes to 'alf an hour?"

Gaz nods. "Whatever makes your routine work, works. Most of us do yoga. Gus listens to bird calls. Simon tells a bad joke."

John glances across the room, where he can see Simon frowning at the whiteboard from practice earlier. They'd apparently been working on their forward positioning and passes. Things that didn't really impact John in the grand scheme of things. He looked as though he was examining the board under a microscope, analysing it for any secrets, for the answer to a problem John didn't know existed.

As if Simon felt the eyes on him, He turned to look at John, and John was hit with that same calculating stare. Out on the pitch, Simon's

glare was a forest fire. But here in the locker room the warmth was more subtle; More a mug of hot chocolate than a forest fire. His hair was still damp, having come fresh from a shower, with the occasional rivulet falling behind his ear, down his neck, and catching on the collar of his shirt. A part of John- the stupid, horny part- wanted to go over there and lick it off. Instead, he settled on taking a swig of his water bottle.

Maybe a year long contract had been too long.

Chapter End Notes

Follow me on twitter [here!](#)

Centre Circle

Chapter Summary

A brief time skip here. Take a peak at some of the homelife for Simon and John

Chapter Notes

Cw for this chapter, brief mention of alcohol

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Tommy had warned Simon in advance, so he was prepared for it. Or so he thought. When he had arrived at his mother's house for their regular midweek dinner, Joseph had full on sprinted down the hall, launching himself at his uncle with an agility that Simon should have been surprised at. Beth, the saint she was, had grabbed the chocolates Simon had brought for dessert just in time for Simon to free his hands to catch the seven year old torpedo.

"UNCLE SIMON!! You guys did so good. Johnny did four saves in two minutes, and then he had the crossbar catch and then he BOOTED it to Gaz and then Gaz kicked to you and then YOU SCORED And it was so cool. AND THEN They had the penalty kick and Johnny saved it and it was so cool and then-" he cut himself off, taking in a deep breath.

"Jo darling, you don't need to tell him everything, he was there, remember?"

"Oh yeah" Joseph replied. "Did you have fun Uncle Si?"

"So much fun" Simon replied. He was telling the truth too. For the past month, they'd been playing great. Their defence was a solid wall, their midfield were making great passes, and their strikers were reliable. Even Simon had been improving. He'd been getting better at faking the opposing keepers, and was getting better at getting between the defenders. Of course, Johnny was killing it. He hadn't let in a goal in the past three games. It was driving Simon wild.

He lowered Joseph to the ground, taking in the boy's appearance. His blond hair was simultaneously sticking up in all directions *and* falling into his eyes. For a moment, he looked just like Tommy had at his age, full of unrestrained optimism and joy, a fire their father had yet to

extinguish. The first time Simon had held Joseph, when he was small enough to be fully supported with one of Simon's arms, Simon had promised him that he wouldn't know the home life that he and Tommy had. Would be as happy as possible. So far, he'd made good on that promise.

He took in the rest of his appearance, noting that he was wearing a Soldier's shirt, the navy blue one with their crest on the left breastbone, where the heart was.

Another added bonus of having John on the team was that his nephew finally agreed to wear his team's jersey, instead of some random team from Sheffield. Sure, He knew that if Joseph turned around it wouldn't say 'RILEY', but Simon was trying to get better at accepting little victories.

"AND, Mama said we could go to the next game IN person, Since I did well on my School report" Joseph said excitedly. "I get to see Johnny MacTavish play IN PERSON! Do you think I'd be able to meet him?" He was looking up at Simon, and for a moment he reminded him of a puppy begging for scraps of food at the table.

Simon screamed internally. The last thing he needed was John knowing how much Joseph adored him. He knew he wouldn't hear the end of it.

"Maybe. You'll have to ask him nicely though. Remember what your mum and dad taught you about saying please and thank you"

Joseph nodded. Simon could tell he wanted to say more, but was interrupted by Tommy's yell in the kitchen, telling him to go wash up for dinner. Joseph looked towards Simon one last time, before scampering up the stairs to follow his father's instruction.

Their next game was in three days. That gave Simon enough time to mentally prepare for Whatever fallout was going to happen. He signed; a deep exhale he'd been repressing since Joseph had leaped into his arms. He pulled out his phone and shot off a quick message to the team group chat.

Simon

> Heads up team. Joseph is coming to the next game. I expect best behaviour.

Gaz's reply had been almost instant

Gaz

> From us or from him?

Simon

> Weirdly, I don't need to tell Jo to behave, he just does.

> You lot, on the other hand.

—

John was sat on the couch in the modest living room of his new flat when he heard his phone vibrate on the coffee table. He ignored it, in favour of the task at hand. On the couch next to him, so entwined that they were the same person, was his guest.

He'd been out at the pub earlier, desperate to get out of the house, when the American Tourist had walked up to him, all red hair and charming smile, and ordered an American Whiskey. John hadn't been able to refrain from scoffing at him, which the American noticed, based on the way he turned to lean on the bar to stare at him.

"What's wrong with American Whiskey?"

"Why order American when you've got Scotch on your doorstep?" John had replied, holding out his glass to the stranger. "Hear, have a sip"

Mr American had taken the glass and followed John's instruction. "You're right, pretty good" He had then leaned in closer, crowded into John's space in a way that he had craved. He realised, in that moment, how *Long* it had been since he'd had a good shag, or even a heavy make out session. "I bet it tastes better on your mouth though" Mr American had whispered, his lips brushing against the shell of John's ear. "I'm Michael. What's your name"

"John" he had replied. "Want to go back to mine? I've got better Whiskey than this place could dream of selling" Was he really doing this? Michael nodded, turning to grab his coat.

And now here they were, making out on John's couch like a couple of teenagers. John hadn't even had the chance to show off his whiskey collection, since Michael had pressed him up against the front door as soon as it closed behind them. After a few minutes of trading lazy kisses, the American- Michael, John's brain supplied- had dragged them to the couch, where he had climbed onto John's lap and continued kissing him, trailing his lips and teeth up and down his neck.

When John woke up the next morning, Michael was gone. He found a note on the bedside table.

Sorry I had to leave, had an early train to France. Text me

John didn't even try to read the numbers, scrunching the note up and tossing it in the bin without looking to see if it landed.

—

When he showed up in the locker room, the first thing he felt was Simon's stare directly on him. No, on his neck. He had seen the damage Michael had left with him, but knew there was nothing he could do to hide it. The others had congratulated him, had asked him questions about 'how beautiful she was' and 'if she was a good lay'

John had shot them down "I dinnae kiss and tell lads."

But now, Simon was staring at him. Glaring at him. Glaring at the bruising on his neck, as if he wanted to rip out John's throat.

Oh. Of course, John was a player. Of fucking course he'd be the kind of player to show up to the game covered in love bites like a teenager. He felt the anger simmer inside of him.

"Alright you Muppets, huddle in" Price called out to the room. Simon gave one calf stretch, before moving over to join his team. Ended up opposite him, and his eyes were once again drawn to the mess of bruising on his neck. Had it gotten darker in the past thirty seconds?

Price spoke up again. "Alright team, Focus up. Remember your training, focus on the passing. Defenders, this team likes to play the outside, so make sure you're filling those gaps. John, Watch your side posts. Hands in."

The players all reached into the circle, piling their hands on top of each other. Simon had somehow ended up with John's on top of his, and suddenly could only think about the warmth radiating from the man's palm. He must have just taken off his gloves. Distantly, he heard Price's voice. "Count us in Captain."

Simon sucked in a breath. His MacTavish crisis would have to wait until after they beat the Spurs. "Soldiers on three. ONE. TWO. THREE. SOLDIERS"

The shout echoed in the locker room, bouncing back off the walls and right back into Simon. It completely encompassed him, wrapped

around him like a blanket. It moved into the hallway, and then onto the pitch, the team moving as one solid unit of noise and excitement. It was an energy Simon hoped they could carry to a victory.

As he walked out, he was hit by the wall of noise, thousands of people coming out to watch them. Just to the left of the coach's box, a few rows back, Simon saw his family. His mother, wrapped up in a homemade Soldier's scarf and knitted hat combination, a warm coat that Simon could tell would smell like her perfume. Next to her was Joseph, who was standing in his seat and clapping. He cheered when Simon met his gaze, putting both his hands to the centre of his chest and outstretching them. Simon paused for a moment, mirroring the gesture back to him. Vaguely, he could hear the commentators giving their pre-game introductions.

"And here we have the Manchester Soldiers. Led by Captain Simon Riley, who is currently on a three-game scoring streak. Now, Andrew, what can you tell me about the Soldiers right now."

"Well obviously Liam, the biggest news right now is Still John MacTavish in net. Today will be his fifth game with the Soldiers and so far he's shown that he was a great addition. He's turned their record around. You can imagine coach Price breathing a sigh of relief when he signed the contract."

"Alright, now, as we prepare for kick off, what can fans expect for this match?"

"The Spurs will hope to score a win with fast, hard play. The soldiers will need to focus on breaking up those passes, getting the interceptions they need, and making sure their own passes are clean."

Simon met the opposite captain at centre field for the coin toss. He could still feel the warmth on the back of his hand, burning hot against the frigid air. The official threw the coin up, had the opposition call it while in the air. "Heads"

It landed with a soft thud onto the grass. Tails.

At least they would be able to get the first kick off.

@FootballUpdates

Manchester Soldiers vs Tottenham Hotspurs kick off shortly. Follow for game highlights and live updates here

@ChelzorDes

At Man vs Spurs today and omg it's SO COLD. How the hell are these guys

sweating.

@Foxinthefields

*MacTavish to Vargas to Garrick to Riley for the SCORE. MY BOYS!!
They're a team!!*

@AshlaBral

Manchester Soldiers are playing some of the cleanest football around right now. Have to wonder what MacTavish is bringing to the locker room.

@Art_4ngel_

Swear to God if MacTavish gets a shutout this game all his teammates are legally required to kiss him on the grounds look says right here in the rule book.

|

@AbmikiRii

Reply to @Art_4ngel_: Did you see the marks on his neck? Looks like he's already got someone showing him a good time.

|

@ArchiiveofJM

Reply to @AbmikiRii: God I wish that was me

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading! Also thank you for the twitter users who let me use their usernames

I'm at a weird impasse right now where i'll probably need more chapters, but also i'm very quickly running out of football terms to use.

Follow me on twitter [here!](#)

Locker Room Talk

Chapter Summary

Joseph and John meet, and John gets his wires crossed

Chapter Notes

Me: This chapter is getting a little long, I should split it up into two.

Also Me: Publishes both on the same day.

If you're reading this by going most recent chapter, make sure you've already read chapter 5

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

John was halfway through scrubbing his boots when Simon entered the locker room “Oi. All of You” He shouted, his voice bellowing to be heard in the post-win chatter. “Make sure your dicks are put away!” He then immediately turned and walked back out.

John looked around, confused, as the team tripped over themselves to ensure they're dressed. Maybe the press are coming in?

A few minutes later, Simon returns into the room. The first thing John noticed is that he looked happier. Less...grouchy. The second thing he noticed is the tiny doppelganger holding his hand. It was as though someone had taken Simon Riley, cloned him, and then shrunk him down to the size of a seven year old. He even had Simon's eyes, that same caramelised honey brown that were almost golden when the light hit them. It's at that moment he remembered the text Simon had sent to the team a few days prior. This must be Joseph. Behind them, there was a woman holding a child sized Manchester Soldier's backpack, and an older woman with blond hair and smile lines who was currently talking to Price. That must be Simon's wife and his mother.

He looked back to the child, who was eagerly pulling at the hem of his father's shirt to get his attention. John watched as Simon knelt down to be eye level with the boy, who whispered something to him. Simon glanced around the room, before pausing at John, and then turned back towards his son. Simon let out a small nod, apparently agreeing to what Joseph had asked, based on the child's response to throw his hands up in the air and shout “YES”.

Then, to John's horror, both Rileys turned to face him. Joseph looked like he wanted to sprint over, but was held back by Simon's hand on his shoulder. As he approached, John was suddenly hyper aware of the marks still covering his neck. Once they were close enough, the boy held out his hand. "Hello Mr MacTavish. My name's Joseph"

John could handle kids. Grew up surrounded by a whole clan of MacTavish nieces and nephews. He could handle one conversation with his Captain's son. He met Joseph's hand, giving it a solid handshake before dropping it "Nice to meet you, Joseph. Did you enjoy the game?"

Joseph's entire face lit up. The same way Simon's did when the team scored a goal. It was nice to have the opportunity to see it so closely.

"It WAS AMAZING!! YOU WERE SO GREAT" Joseph responded

"Aye, but I'm only as good as the team though, you know how it is" He could feel his neck warming slightly. "Besides, he's the one that scored two goals" John gestured to Simon, who was looking at John with an expression that for once, John couldn't place. Somewhere between 'please stop talking' and 'I want to strangle you'

"I've only been on the team for a month, and I'm already your favourite player?" John questioned.

"I used to support you when you played with Sheffield" Joseph said, leaning close to John like it was a secret to be shared only with him. Based on the scowl Simon was wearing, it wasn't that secret.

"Och really? Even when I was playing against the Soldiers?"

Simon let out a sigh where he was standing above them, folding his arms over his chest. "Yes," he replied. There was a weight behind those words. John had to wonder how many arguments the two of them had had over him.

John looked back at Joseph, who was staring down at the half-cleaned shoe next to John. That's right, he'd been cleaning them when Simon came in. "Is it true that you do this after EVERY Game?"

"Yep," John answered. "And before as well. And after every practice."

"Is that why you play so good?"

John lets out a chuckle at that. "It's one of the reasons, I think. It also

helps that I eat all my veggies and do whatever my ma tells me. Do you do that?" he asked, looking at the boy with a tilt of the head.

Joseph nodded in excitement. "AND I do all my maths work. And my after school reading. Mum says that all the best goalies did their after school reading"

"Well, your ma must be pretty smart. That's exactly what I did too, when I was your age." John laughed at that. He looked up at Simon, who's stone glare had turned to something softer.

Joseph nodded eagerly, head bobbing so fast that John was worried he'd topple over. After a moment, he looked at John, squinting his eyes slightly as if he was examining him. God, he really was his father's son. "What happened to your neck"

Ah. That. John reached up to rub against the mark. "Got kicked by a football during practice. Knocked me right off my boots"

Joseph frowned at that. "Are you okay now?"

"Have to be," John answered. "Otherwise Price wouldn't have let me play."

"Joseph sweetie, we gotta go" John looked up, meeting eyes with the beautiful woman from earlier. "Oh, Hi, you must be John, I'm Beth" She had a nice smile. John noted. He'd have to ask Simon at some point how the two of them had met. He honestly couldn't imagine someone like Beth agreeing to marry Simon.

Were they even married? She was wearing a ring, but he'd never seen Simon wear one. Maybe he didn't wear it when he was playing because he wanted to keep it safe. Or maybe, he'd done what some of the guys on John's old teams had done, and got a wedding tattoo instead.

"Thanks for indulging him. He plays goalie as well, wants to be like you when he grows up." Beth confessed. And oh, didn't that just melt John's heart.

"Really, I would have thought that he'd look up to Simon for sure." John had answered. He looked over to the two Rileys, who had joined in on the conversation with Price and Simon's mother.

"I think the novelty has worn off, ya know?" Beth had answered. "But with you, it's like you're the shiny new toy." and with that, she

walked off, striding across the room to help Joseph put on his backpack

John did know. Beth didn't realise how correct she was, in identifying how John felt. Ever since he joined the team, he had been treated as a shiny object by the press and the fans, a shiny trinket for them to look at and examine and evaluate like a statuette on *Antique Roadshow*. He felt like he was one fumble away from shattering in the floor, or tarnishing in the elements. He scratched at his neck, before returning to scrubbing at his boots.

A few minutes later, he felt the bench next to him dip slightly. He looked up, seeing Simon sitting there. He leaned down to untie his boots, not making eye contact with John. The silence stretched between them.

"You didn't have to do all that" Simon said eventually. "All the stuff about the vegetables and homework and shit"

"I know" John replied. "Kid has a good head on his shoulders"

"That he does." Simon agreed. "He gets it from his mother."

John laughs at that. "Well, he's not getting it from you."

Simon says nothing in reply, instead, he reaches up and smacks John on the back of the head. Not enough to cause pain, or even jostle him slightly. After a moment, Simon speaks again.

"Well. Thank you" His voice is soft when he speaks. Uncharacteristically soft.

"What for?" John asks in return

"I don't know... For not being a prick? For not telling him to fuck off like I thought you would."

"I wouldnae tell a child to fuck off" John replied. "Do you honestly think that I would?"

"I used to." Simon confessed. "Now... I don't know what to expect from you." With that, he stands, both boots now off and in his hand. He goes to walk back to his gear bag, but turns and looks back at John

"Oh, and Johnny? Next time you hook up with a woman, tell her to keep the bites below the collar. I don't wanna have to see that shit."

Chapter End Notes

Follow me on twitter [here!](#)

Also thank you for all the nice comments on the previous chapters. It's been the main reason I'm actually motivated to see this work through to completion.

Travelling Army

Chapter Summary

Away game, and the night at the hotel.

Chapter Notes

I've been going through it today, so my way of coping is writing another chapter.

Brief mentions of Alcohol in this chapter.

Edit: I made a spotify playlist for this fic.

<https://open.spotify.com/playlist/3xrQlS10xjB3CZNnTgxF2q?si=DBcq-M6pTqi-AODaxGn4yQ>

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

John hated away games. Hated sitting on a bus for a long time. Hated playing on an unfamiliar pitch. Hated sitting in a locker room that wasn't his own. Hated having to share a hotel room with a teammate. His last teammate, Chester, had an awful habit of hooking up with women and bringing them back to their hotel room when John was asleep. It was why, when he had first negotiated with Price, he wanted a hotel room for himself.

Their game had been fine. They'd barely managed to irk out a win in the final ten minutes, thanks to a filthy crossbar goal from Gaz that had earned him man of the match.

John had played like shit and he knew it. Had let in two easy blocks in the first half, that had forced their forwards to work extra hard to secure the tie in the second half. HE could tell that Simon especially was pissed off at him because of it.

But still, a win was a win, and the rest of the team seemed to be in an upbeat mood over it.

“Alright lads. Quick thing. The hotel we booked for tonight overbooked, and so all of you will have to share rooms. I don't care how you sort yourselves. If anyone has an issue-” and John swore Price looked directly at him as he said it “-Please come see me, but I expect you to be adults about this. Alright?”

There was a resounding groan on the bus, cut through by Alejandro shouting “Dibs on bunking with Rudy!” By the time the bus arrived at the hotel, most people were paired up.

John stumbled off the bus, still replaying the game in his mind, when Price sidled up to him. “Sorry about this kid, I know it's not what you wanted.” he looked genuinely apologetic too, based on his downturned expression and creased brow.

“It's fine,” John replied. “As long as whoever I’m with doesn’t snore, I’ll be fine.”

“You’re in luck then. Simon sleeps like the dead.”

Had it been the start of his time, John would have immediately requested a swap, anyone but Simon. He was still half tempted to. But instead, he just nodded, took the key card John held out for him, shouldered his luggage and made his way up to the room.

The room itself was nice. Two twin sized beds, a small table. A door off to the side that led to a decently sized bathroom. It was on the better end of away game hotels. The bed closest to the wall had a plain black luggage on it, meaning that Simon was already in.

The room even had a balcony, a door that opened up to a view of the city. The door was closed, and John could see Simon on the other side of it, pacing the small balcony while chatting on his phone. He’d mentioned before the game that it was Joseph’s birthday today, And John felt bad that he wouldn’t be there to celebrate with his son. If he listened carefully, which he definitely wasn’t doing, he could pick up parts of what Simon was saying on the phone.

“No Beth, I’m not going to do that.” Simon said. His voice seemed agitated a little bit. “Can’t you just google it? There’s thousands of photos of it- Why does it need to be a video? - I know you already explained it, I just don’t see why- Okay. Fine. I’ll do it. I still think it’s a stupid idea though-”

John stopped listening at this point, tuning out what was very quickly starting to sound like a lovers' dispute. Instead, he kicked his shoes off and flung himself onto his bed to scroll through his phone, doing his best to appear as though he hadn’t been listening to his Captain argue with his wife.

@KyleGarrick19

So honoured to be named man of the match today. Thanks for the love!

Our team were all superstars #GoSoldiers

@FutballDaily

Yeah ManSol won today, but it was an absolute piss poor performance by their defence in the first half. It's like they were still sleeping.

@WillowWillowWillow

John MacTavish played like shit in the first half but thats okay bc he looked pretty while doing it

@GregJohAlpha

*Replying to @WillowWillowWillow: Typical female fans all they care about is players looks *rolling eyes emoji**

@WillowWillowWillow

Replying to @GregJohnAlpha: Cry about it piss boy

@PLAnalysis

Manchester Soldiers are starting to show signs of slowing down. What can coach Price do to speed them back up. Read our insight here: [Bit.ly/PremLeagueAnal](https://bit.ly/PremLeagueAnal)

@ChelzorDes

Replying to @PLAnalysis: Mate ngl this analysis is dogshit. You say they need to get rid of MacTavish, but who tf would they replace him with? Keller is still on crutches and their last guy was clinging on by the skin of his teeth.

@ManchesterIHardlyKnowHer

So have we figured out if Simon Riley and John MacTavish still hate each other? They didnt look like besties today

@MacieGracie

Kyle Garrick man of the match I am single and available this Friday if you would like to hang out

@stephanieNotStefany

Is it just me or does Price look like a total dilt these days?

@Sweetlittleguy

Oh to be a football player tenderly hugging your teammate after they score the game winning goal

The door to the balcony slid open, pulling John out of the rabbit hole of thirst tweets he'd fallen down. When John looked up, he saw Simon looking down at him from where he stood in the middle of the room.

"All good?" John asked

Simon nodded in return. "Beth said to thank you, by the way. Joseph's been eating all his vegetables since you spoke to him."

"No Problem. Anything for the wee lad. It was his birthday today, right?"

Simon nods. "He's eight now. Feels like just yesterday he was small enough to fit in my arm." His gaze goes distant for a moment, and John can hear his voice soften. "Now he's old enough to be running his mother mad."

"Sounds like me at that age. What did you get him for his birthday?"

"New football boots. Bright red. I'm giving them to him when I see him next."

Simon talking about his son was quickly becoming John's favourite version of him. His eyes held a warmth in them that he'd never directed towards John, or anyone on their team for that matter. The lines in his face softened. For a moment, it felt as though he was simply a man, void of the pressures being a Premier League Captain had on him. Fatherhood suited the man. It made him more handsome.

Simon looked down at his phone again, and then back to Simon. He looked as though he wanted to say something, opening his house, then closing it. John only looked back at him, and waited for him to speak.

"Can I take a video of your hair?"

That's not what John had been expecting. "O' course you can Si, gonna show your barber?"

Simon lets out a huff of air. If John didn't know better, he would say that it was a laugh. "Not Quite. Jo's asking for a 'haircut just like Johnny's', but Beth won't let him get it without a proper reference video to show his hair stylist, in case they mess it up."

"Beth's a smart woman" John replied. "Alright then. Do you want me to stand and give you a twirl?"

Simon glared at John in response. He did, however, also lift his phone, pressing the camera button. John stood, turned in a slow rotation, pausing when his back was to the camera to show off how the mohawk tapered off at the end.

“He’s gonna look pure braw with it” John says, once Simon has put his phone away.

“I have no idea what that means, Johnny”

“Mean’s he’ll look really good with it”

“We’ll see” Simon hums. He’s looking down at his phone, likely shooting the message off to Beth. The two of them are engulfed once again in a comfortable silence.

A silence that is quickly interrupted by a knock on their door. Simon makes no move to open it, leaving it to John to answer. When he opens the door, he’s greeted by the sight of Gaz and Roach, both wearing a style of clothing that can only be described as “Smart casual”.

“Hey Soap, Hey Cap. A bunch of us are going down to the bar for a drink and a bite, you down?”

John glanced back towards Simon, who shook his head. The man had kicked off his shoes and was spread out on his own bed, socked feet tucked into the blankets that he’d bundled at the bottom of his bed.

“We’re good” John replied, turning back to his teammates. “M’ pure bane-weary after today’s game. Going to order room service and sleep until I have to be on the bus”

“Okay mate. If you change your mind, text us, we’ll let you know where we’re at.” And with that, they walked off, leaving John standing in the doorway to his room.

“You could have gone with them, you know” Simon supplied, from where he was sittin gon his bed.

“I know” John answered. “But then I’d miss out on the joy of sitting in complete silence while you glared at me until I caught fire” John replied.

“I don’t glare at you” Simon argued.

John just laughs in reply. “Captain, you’ve glared at me since the day we first met. Was starting to think you didn’t like me”

Simon went silent. John risked a glance at him, saw the way he looked like he’d been struck in the face. “You really think that?” His

voice is impossibly soft now, barely a whisper. In the otherwise silent room, it may as well had been a scream.

"I did, very briefly," John confessed. "It's like Gaz had said, I just needed to get used to you. I think part of it was that you couldn't score on me. You couldn't help but feel frustrated at me."

"Yeah well, it was frustrating," Simon answered. "Still is. How are you able to read my body language so well."

"You telegraph. You practically tell me exactly where you're going. Back when we played opposite, I could tell when you were going to pass verses when you were going to go for a score. It's just something I've been able to do."

"But *how*? " Simon asked.

John considers him for a moment, sees the tension that's slowly growing in his shoulders. He's tempted, in this moment, to make a wisecrack remark or stupid joke, but stops himself. He heard the desperation in Simon's voice in that question. It makes him pause and think. Simon hasn't been able to score against him in *years* at this point, and it's only just hitting John now how much that might have affected the blond man. So, he opens his mouth, and tells the truth.

"It's your eyes. I'm not looking at your body language. I'm looking at your eyes. You always glance in the direction you're aiming. Top right, bottom left. Off to the side if you're going to pass. It's only just for a moment, but that's all I need. I want to know what you're aiming for, I look at your eyes, they're telling me what you're targeting."

"My eyes?" Simon asked.

John nods in reply. "Windows to Simon Riley's soul" he says, pointing two fingers at his own eyes, and then to Simon's. With that, he stands, and picks up the room service menu sitting on the desk in the corner of the room. "Now, what overpriced piss do they have in the minibar? I need a drink."

"It's all shite" Simon replied, "I had a look earlier when I was on the phone with Beth."

"Hey that reminds me" John says. "Since I answered your question, can you ask one of mine."

Simon thinks for a moment, purses his lips and furrows his brow.

“Sure” he says eventually. “But I get to veto it if I don’t want to.”

“Were you happy when I joined the team?”

“Simon lets out a low hum, turning the question over in his head. Honestly, I remember being mad about it at first. Tried to convince Price to change his mind. He didn’t listen.”

“Why? Hated me that much, did you?”

“No” Simon answered, almost instantly. “I wanted to. Kept waiting for you to fuck up so I could turn to Price and say ‘I told you so’ but like always-” Simon pauses, “-Price was right. You’re a good fit for this team. I’m glad to have you on it.”

John turns his attention back to the menu, definitely not feeling a warmth rise on his neck.

“I played like shit today though”

“We all did,” Simon replied. “Only reason we were able to pull out the win is because of Gaz. But it’s a team sport, so it’s okay to play like shit occasionally.” He looks bored as he says that, as though he has given this speech hundreds of times. Has heard it even more. “But we’re going to go home, rest up and then head into practice with clear goals and improve, because that’s what our job is.”

“Alright, and what’s your goal then? What are you going to be working on?”

Simon leans forward, resting his elbows on his knees, the hint of a coy smile on his mouth, his eyes fixed on John “Isn’t it obvious? I’m going to score a goal against you *Johnny*. ”

Chapter End Notes

Follow me on twitter [here!](#)

Picking up some pace here. I'm very excited for where the story is going next.

Target Man

Chapter Notes

A Lot of this chapter was written on a bus (train got cancelled) while listening to the Stick Season album by Noah Kahan (good album, especially if you grew up in a small town)

Content Warning for this chapter: Nightmares, Depictions of abuse,

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Simon felt the wetness dripping down his face. He could taste the copper leak into his mouth, the bitter taste of it coating his tongue and staining his teeth. Distantly, he could hear Tommy calling his voice, but it was drowned out by another sickening crack to the centre of his face. It hurt. He wanted it to stop. But he knew that if he resisted his father would target his brother instead. And it was Simon's job to protect Tommy. His mother had told him so, when He was just a tiny baby, and Simon was six. His mother had made him promise to look after Tommy when She wouldn't be able to. And now here he was, almost a decade later,

This, Simon thinks, probably wasn't what she had in mind.

He could feel his body being shaken now, jostled harshly in a way that made the pain in his face even worse. He was crying now, the saltiness of his tears stinging the cuts on his face, fresh from the gaudy rings his father wore when he would attend his concerts. He missed his mother. Hated when she had a late shift at the diner.

His father shoved at him, sent him sprawling onto the hardwood floor. Tommy was shouting now, calling Simon's name as if that would help. If he could have, He would have opened his mouth and told Tommy to go away, go back upstairs. He opened his mouth to call out to Tommy to tell him to go to his room, but right as he sucked in a breath of air, his father stomped on Simon's arm, and instead of his own words, all Simon could hear was the brittle snapping of his arm, and his own guttural scream of pain.

"Simon! Wake UP"

Simon jolted awake, the piercing pain in his arm quickly fading away to numbness. Blinkd his eyes to adjust to his surroundings.

He took stock of what he could see. Hotel room. Twin bed. Soft sheets. A second Twin bed next to his. A Shirtless John MacTavish in front of him, gripping at his wrists in a way that was almost a little too tight, but worked to ground him.

“Johnny?”

“It’s me, Simon. You okay? You were screaming.”

Simon swallowed, could still taste the blood from his broken nose.

“Right. Sorry for waking you”

“Piss off with that. Are you okay? What do you need?”

Simon looked at the digital clock in his bedside table, the red lights a beacon in the darkness. 4:39am. “I think I need to go for a run,” he says, moving to push the blankets off of him. Johnny was still in front of him, holding onto his wrists. Still shirtless.

“Okay” John nods. “We can go for a run”

And with that, John stands, goes over to his luggage, and turns away from John so he can get dressed. Simon gives himself a moment to admire John’s silhouette in the soft light of the hotel room, illuminated by a lamp next to John’s bed. He must have turned it on when he heard Simon’s nightmare.

Simon gave himself exactly ten seconds to wallow in his emotions. To feel the pain, embarrassment, anger and grief he always experienced after a nightmare. Then he was up, quickly changing into his running gear. When he turned around, he saw that John was lacing up his own running shoes.

Less than five minutes later, they’re in the lobby of their hotel. The world outside still dark.

“You don’t have to come with me, you know,” Simon muttered. It feels almost like a confession,

“I know” He’s stretching his quads as he speaks, standing on foot and pulling the other to rest against his arse. Great balance, Simon notes, not a hint of instability standing on one leg. “Maybe I also want to go

for a run at ass 'o'clock in the morning when it's pure fuckin Baltic"

Simon couldn't help but laugh at Johnny's complaining combined with the absurdity of him warming up to run with Simon before the sun had even begun rising.

"Alright captain, let's go" John said, before jogging out the lobby and down the steps leading up to the street.

They ran in silence, at first. Simon wanted to push himself, run as hard and as fast as he could until the burning in his lungs overpowered the phantom pains in his arm, his nose, his face, his chest. Wanted to run until the screaming of his leg muscles was louder than Tommy's shouts and his father's curses.

But he had Johnny with him, and he seemed happy to keep a steady pace. Fast enough that they covered decent ground, but slow enough that Simon was able to take in his surroundings. God, he didn't even know what city he was in right now. The details still so far away. He knew that they had won their game, but that was about it. He'd have to talk to Price, maybe on the bus home.

"So, you want to talk about what happened earlier?"

"No."

"Okay" John answered. "Want to talk at all?"

"Not really"

"Will you keep answering my questions?"

"Maybe."

They pause at an intersection, wait for the little man to turn green, and continue running. John's still keeping pace, Simon notices, even with all the talking.

"Okay. I can work with a maybe. What's your mother's name"

"Victoria"

"What's your middle name?"

"Joseph."

“Cute. Do the nightmares happen often?”

Simon comes to a dead stop. He hadn't expected John to push it. John kept jogging, for a few more metres, before realising that Simon was frozen still on the dark footpath. He swallowed, the lump in his throat cutting off his breathing. “Sometimes. Only when I'm away from home”

John nodded. “I get that. What's your favourite colour?”

Simon thought for a moment. “Black, but Joseph told me that's not a colour.”

“Aye, it's a *shade*. ” John said. “Had an art teacher in school that ranted at me for the same thing.

Simon could picture it. Could picture a baby-faced Johnny getting on the nerves of all his teachers. “If black doesn't count, then I'd say Blue”

“Really? I would have clocked you for a green guy, to be honest Si”

“Green?” Simon asked. “Why green?”

“It's obvious. The perfect pitch green. All freshly mowed.”

“Not everything has to be about football” Simon says. It strikes him that the two of them are still standing in the middle of the path, the street around them only just showing signs of life. A woman on her phone on the other side of the road. A man on a bicycle goes past them on the road.

“Alright then, why blue?”

“I don't know,” Simon says with a shrug, before looking up to meet the cobalt of Johnny's eyes. “It's just the perfect colour.”

—

By the time they get back to the hotel, the pain in Simon's body was replaced with a satisfying warmth. Johnny must have been feeling a similar warmth, based on the flush that tinted his face and ears. They rode the elevator up to the room in silence, John focused on his phone, Simon staring straight ahead at the reflective mirror of the elevator, watching Johnny thumb at his phone. He wondered what Johnny did. Did he scroll through social media like Gaz, read eBooks

like Rudy and Chuy do on the bus, or was he like Reyes, and swipe through various dating profiles, trying to find a quick lay in the city they were visiting. Based on the marks John had shown up with the other week, the latter was most likely.

Simon thought back to when he had seen the marks on John's neck. Felt the anger simmer just below his skin. At the time, he'd had to take a moment, escape into the hallway to do the de-escalation techniques his therapist had given him for when he felt like boiling up over simple inconveniences. Sure, it made sense that John would sleep with a woman. He was a successful, stupidly handsome professional athlete. Women would be stupid not to fall for him. What didn't make sense was the irritation, the anger *he* had felt seeing the bruises on Johnny's neck.

No, not anger. Jealousy.

Those should be my marks had filled his head at the moment, a train of thought so dangerous he had to immediately pivot to something else. It had haunted him like a ghost as he went about his day. Every time he saw Johnny, Simon's gaze had gone directly to his throat, to the splattering of marks John's mystery woman left behind and every time he wanted to leave his own, to claim Johnny as his.

Even now, standing outside their hotel room, waiting for Johnny to unlock the door with his key card, all he could think about was burying his face into Johnny's collar bones and staying there forever.

He swallowed. Gave him one more moment, one final moment, to admire Johnny's side profile as he pushed into the room, before burying the feeling in the bottom of his chest. The last thing he needed was falling in love with his teammate. So, he wouldn't.

@AshlaBral

Listen It might have been the sleep deprivation but I'm pretty sure I just saw Simon Riley and John MacTavish in the middle of a run at like three am.

@SamanthaIAm

Replying to @AshlaBral: Did you see the Mohawk?

@AshlaBral

Replying to @SamanthaIAm: YES, OMG IT TOTALLY WAS THEM. SIRS IT IS THREE AM WHY ARE YOU RUNNING

Chapter End Notes

Follow me on twitter [here!](#)

If you missed it, I made a spotify playlist for the Manchester Soldier's locker room. you can listen to it [here!](#)

Fakeout

Chapter Notes

Please Note the change in age rating. I don't think it's fully needed, but better to be safe than sorry.

CW: Alcohol Mention. Sex after consuming alcohol (no consent issues)

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

When John entered the locker room for their next practice, he could see Simon and Price in the coach's office. Price was sitting on his office chair, leaning back, while Simon was leaning against the desk in a way that was open and casual. He knocked on the door frame as he passed it, making the two men in the office aware of his presence, before sitting at the bench underneath his cubby and beginning to scrub at his boots. There was a dark smudge of mud that was clinging to the laces, about the size of John's thumbnail, that was stubbornly clinging on.

After a moment, his boots were eclipsed by a shadow, a familiar silhouette that John would have been able to identify even without looking up. He did though, let himself take in the view of Simon above him, haloed by the ceiling light and his blond hair like a saint in the renaissance paintings John had studied in high school.

"You ready to finally get one past me?" John asked.

"I'm going to fake you out so hard you trip over your own ankles" Simon answered. He had a heat in his eyes, a warmth that met John's gaze and then broke through his ribcage before burying itself next to John's heart. Steamin' Jesus, he had it bad. He buried that thought with a laugh. "We'll see about that. Just because you've got me to tell you the secret doesnae mean I'm going to go easy on you."

"I wouldn't expect you to," Simon replied. "After all, you've got a reputation to uphold"

By now, John and Simon had established their own routine when it came to training, since they were always the first two to arrive. Simon would arrive first, and either spend the time running laps, or having "Captain Duty" meetings with Price. When John arrived, they ran some drills together, before Simon would pick a goal and try to shoot

against John until their teammates started to arrive, or Price directed them to another training method.

Today was no different. Simon ran some laps while John warmed up, stretching out his joints. Then, Simon approached him with a netted bag filled with balls.

“Now remember Si, It’s in the eyes”

“I got it Johnny” Simon answers, rolling one of the balls out of the bag and stopping it under his boot. Then, with a quick glance towards John, he moved.

John had always admired Simon’s speed, back when he was still Riley and one of the scariest fuckers in the league, before John had figured out his tell. Now, as teammates, as friends, there was something thrilling about it. About watching Simon cross the pitch with a set destination in mind, watching him weave between invisible opposing players as if they were toddlers.

If John would have to guess, he would assume Simon would go dead centre, based on the fact that Simon was staring straight at him. He waited until the last possible second, to see if Simon’s eyes would give away his next move.

What he wasn’t expecting was for Simon to close his eyes completely. One minute, John was staring at the warm caramelised honey he’d grown familiar with. Then the next, he was looking at soft pale skin, and the longest, palest eyelashes John had ever seen.

Simon had squeezed his eyes shut, closed them so tightly John could see the creases in the delicate skin. The slightly furrowed brow. Without looking down, John could tell the moment Simon kicked the ball, based solely on the soft gasp he let out.

Focus. He told himself.

Eyes to the ball, he watched it swing right. He dived sideways to meet it, only for the ball to curve in front of his body and hit the back of the net. Dead centre. He looked back to Simon, who still had his eyes closed.

-

Simon blinked his eyes open. The first thing he saw was Johnny, kneeling on the grass and looking up at him. He was smiling, A

prideful, almost shit eating grin, that Simon hadn't seen since he had faced up against him as opponents.

Then he saw the ball.

It was still nestled in the woven ropes of the netting. If he had to guess, it would have scored dead centre, Where John had been standing.

It worked.

He scored against John MacTavish.

John MacTavish, who was pushing himself up to stand, wiping grass off his knees.

John MacTavish, who was grinning up at him with a look of pride. Not for himself, but for Simon.

John MacTavish, who Simon was completely and utterly in love with.

"Think ye can go again?"

Simon nodded in reply, before rolling another ball out of the bag and setting up for a sprint goal. He just needed to repeat the same process. Run. Close eyes. Kick.

This time he heard it. Heard the subtle, barely there 'swish' of the ball hitting the net. Once again, he opened his eyes, only to be met with Johnny's clear blue gaze staring directly at him.

By the time they had stopped, around an hour later as the team started to trickle in for their practice, Simon had gone from clenching his eyes shut to a simple, long blink. That small break in eye contact apparently being enough to make Johnny question where Simon would be aiming.

Towards the later part of their session, Johnny had started intercepting some of the balls, blocking them from going past him. Not enough for it to be satisfying if they were playing an actual game, but enough for him to show that he was improving in his own reflexes.

Their team had gotten invested. Simon was pretty sure that he'd heard Rudy and Gaz running an actual betting pool whilst the rest of their team did their warm up stretches on the sideline

Once the last ball in the bag, A beautiful laces kick that even Simon was impressed with, hit the back of the net, Price gave out two short, sharp whistles, the signal to huddle in. They did, of course, still have an actual training session to run.

In the locker room after training, Simon is halfway through drying off his hair when his phone pings. After a moment, it pings again. Then a third time. Must be Tommy. No one else texted as hurriedly as he did.

Tommy

> Congrats bro

> I'm so proud of you

> Mum wants to know what time you're around for dinner tonight

Attached to Tommy's first message was a link that, when opened, led to Gaz's twitter.

@KyleGarrick19

Wonderful news for @SRiley fans! I just watched, with my own eyes, Simon Riley score a goal against @JohnMacTavish33

Johnny had already retweeted it, adding a gif of Simon celebrating that the premier league fans were fond of using to show success. Simon was pretty sure it had been made by a ManSol Social media manager.

He looked up, noticing that everyone had left already, except for Johnny, who was still scrubbing at his boot.

"Thank you" Simon said, his voice sounding even louder in the empty locker room. "That... That was good"

John looked up at him, smiling at him through dark eyelashes. "You're welcome, Si"

He stood, shouldering his gear bag. "See you at tape review tomorrow?"

Simon nodded, biting his tongue. There was more he wanted to say, but every time he thought about opening his mouth, his brain short circuited.

John patted Simon on the chest once, before turning and walking out of the locker room. Simon stared after him until he disappeared

through the door

Fuck. Simon thought. Even his arse is beautiful.

Their training tomorrow was a half day, an afternoon session that Price had said would focus on tape review of their last game. So John, rather than spending his evening sitting at home, decided to go out. He started to regret that decision, the bar he chose slowly turning more into a nightclub that he was slowly becoming too old to enjoy.

The bartender, A woman that looked like she would have no problem tossing John out to the curb if she wanted, places another Scotch in front of him. "From the guy at the end of the bar."

John looks up, makes eye contact with the man, who lifted his own glass in a cheers, maintaining eye contact with John while downing the entire pint in one go.

Well, there's something John could do. He stood, taking his new drink in hand, and made his way to the other end of the bar.

Up close, his mystery man was surprisingly handsome. He was tall, based on the way he towered over John while still sitting in the stool. He wore glasses, but they suited his face nicely, framed his green eyes like a landscape painting. His nose was straight, likely hadn't been broken or even bruised. He was dressed in a clean, almost silky button-down dress shirt, the collar still nice and crisp. He even had a similar mop of curls, slightly longer though, to what John was very quickly realising was his type.

"So, what name do I say when I thank you for the drink?" John asked.

The man laughed, a light tone that was pleasant, but not the low breathy chuckle John needed to hear. "It's Jake. Do you have a name as pretty as your face?"

He spoke with an accent, his vowels combining together, his tone getting a little bit higher as he spoke. Possibly Australian?

"Call me Johnny" John answered. "Can I ask you a question?"

Jake nodded, leaning closer to hear John better as the music around them thumped louder.

“What were you hoping to get by buying me a drink?”

“Well, your attention, to start” Jake answered “And here you are”

“Is that *all* you wanted?”

“Depends,” Jake smiled as he spoke, a grin that was on the more flirtatious side of coy. He was handsome. “What else are you offering?”

Five minutes later, they're in the alleyway behind the club. The ground underneath Johnny was slightly damp, the cold seeping into the knees of his jeans. Jake's hand was threaded in his hair, pulling his head up and back. There's a hunger in his green eyes, but they lacked the fire John wished he could see instead.

“You look so gorgeous like this” Jake said, and the voice was still so *wrong* ; lacking the slight Manchester twinge he hadn't realised he'd grown fond of until now.

Would Simon compliment him, if it was him here instead of the random Australian with blond hair? Would Simon pull his hair, take all he wanted until John had nothing left to give; or would he be gentle. Would he praise Johnny for his skills, offer kind words of encouragement while John worshipped him on his knees. Or would he be as stoic as he is on the pitch, so goal oriented that he offered not a single breath of communication to the man beneath him.

Jake's breaths became laboured, growing more frantic as he approached his climax, his grip on John's hair tightened, pulling at the scalp and forcing John's head exactly where Jake wanted it to be. John moaned; the pain combined with the brutality being *So close* to what he wanted. What he needed.

Jake gave one more solid thrust before he stilled above John, and soon Johnny tasted a bitterness in his mouth, sliding down his throat. Even that felt wrong.

As Jake tucked himself back into his jeans, John rested on his haunches, sucking in air. His knees were still damp, and he would need to stretch them when he got home otherwise they would stiffen up.

“I'll see you around, yeah?” Jake asked, his tone suggesting an ambivalence to what Johnny's answer would have been. His back was turned before John was able to answer, and soon the blond man had

disappeared inside, leaving John alone in the alley.

He felt his phone vibrate in his back pocket. As he stood, he unlocked it, seeing it light up with a text from Simon.

Simon Riley

> Are you awake? I had something to tell you at practice but I forgot.

John swallowed, the bitter taste of Jake's cum still lingering in the back of his throat.

John

> I'm up. What is it?

Simon Riley

> What tea do Football players drink?

John

> ???

Simon Riley

> Penal-Tea.

John laughed, less at the joke and more at the absurdity of being joked with five minutes after being face fucked by his captain's almost lookalike.

John

> Pretty good. Got any more?

Simon Riley

> What Goalie can jump higher than the crossbar?

John

> None of them?

Simon Riley

> All of them. Crossbars can't jump.

John

> Terrible.

Simon Riley

> Don't worry, there's more where that came from

> I Could go all night.

John

> That's what I'm afraid of.

Chapter End Notes

I love these fucking himbos they're both so stupid.

Follow me on twitter [here!](#)

check out my playlist for the fic [here!](#)

Hat Trick

Chapter by [skerryB](#)

Chapter Summary

Another Day, Another Game. Another Post Game Interview

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

"And Garrick to Reyes through the middle. Reyes back to Garrick. Beautiful passes right now from the Soldiers. Garrick weaving through the Wolves defences. Beautiful crossover to Riley on the outside. Riley goes for it. And IT'S IN. Manchester have tied it one all."

"Beautiful plays from the soldiers the past few games. Their synergy on the pitch has been wonderful. You have to wonder what Price is doing to build those relationships."

"Wolves on the attack now. Smith to Jones to Graves. Graves has no opening, blocked out by the Soldier's defence. He has to pass. He goes for the Goal instead, what IS he DOING? An easy stat padding save for MacTavish, the home crowd loves to see it. The Soldiers in the stands are ecstatic."

"MacTavish kicks it long, received by Riley at the centre circle. Wolves were NOT ready for the distance. They're scrambling. But Riley has the ground. Has the speed. Has the opening. AND HE SLOTS IT BEAUTIFULLY in the top right bins. An inch to the side and it would hit the posts."

"Soldiers are a textbook definition of how you should invest in a goalie. Simon Riley was not making scores that precise before MacTavish. If I was a manager or a coach in this league, I would be keeping one eye on the soldiers and another eye on the goalie market"

"-AND ANOTHER FOR RILEY. Another Hat trick for the Manchester Hometown hero this season. It's starting to look like nothing can slow him down"

After the game, Simon gets pulled into the press room. Because Of

Fuckin' Course he does. What he isn't expecting, however, is for Johnny to plop down in the folding chair next to him. Like Simon, he looks like he hadn't had a chance to hit the showers before being dragged into the press room. His skin had a slight glow to it, and some of the strands of his hair kept slipping loose to fall onto his forehead.

There's a pile of cell phones and audio recorders on the table in front of them, which were suddenly very interesting to look at. Way more interesting than the absolutely breathtaking, gorgeously windswept Johnny sitting just out of the corner of his eye.

"Alright! Let's get this over with" Simon said. Instantly, a sea of hands rose in front of him. He pointed to a woman in the front row, who stood.

"Amelia Chesterson, *The Times*. Simon, today was a great showcase of consistency and communication on the pitch. What do you think has been the biggest cause for success so far this season?"

Simon pauses for a moment, considering the question. He shifts so his weight is resting on his elbows. "Honestly, I think it all comes down to the guys on the team. The men on the pitch. They're all great people. It's easy to work with people you like, and they're all likeable," he answers.

"Anything to add onto that John?"

Simon glances over to Johnny, who is leaned back in his seat. At Least he had the decency to pull the microphone back so it was close enough to pick up his speech. "The leadership also helps. Price and Laswell run a tight ship, but it's a tight ship that people are willing to go down with. Also helps that we've got a capable captain." At that, he gestures to Simon.

Simon could feel a warmth at the back of his neck, and only preys that it doesn't show up on the cameras.

After a pause where neither of them speaks, the journalists raise their hands again. Johnny picks one, pointing at a man in a mustard blazer. "Hamish Trinity, *The Sun*-" He's cut off by a low groan from the reporters in the room. "-Question for MacTavish. You've been with the Manchester Soldiers for several months now. Does that mean you're willing to reveal the reason for your departure from Sheffield?"

Simon feels it before he sees it. Feels John freeze up. Can see the exact moment his relaxed posture turns rigid. Sees his hand clench into a

tight fist. It only a moment, but Simon sees it.

“No comment” John answers, his voice flat, a single tone. So very unlike what Simon is used to that it throws him off.

“But Surely there's something-”

“He said no comment!” Simon cuts him off. He very briefly thinks about how the analysts will say he was too harsh. He spots Laswell in the back of the room and catches her rolling her eyes. A quick glance towards Johnny reveals that, at a surface level, he seems to be back to normal, but Simon can still see a slight tension in his Trapezius muscle, the clench of his fist, the bouncing of his leg underneath the table.

Silently, John points to another journalist.

“Seth Gunnerson, *the Independent*. .” Good, Simon knew Seth, he was a familiar face in the press room, which meant he hadn’t been kicked out for some stupid shit. “Question for Simon. Many analysts have tied MacTavish’s arrival to the team to your own improvement in scoring. Care to comment on that?”

It's a good question. Simon thinks. A softball that he's tossed to Simon for him to choose how to answer.

"Logically, it makes sense." Simon answers. "You get one of the best goalies for your strikers to practise with. Odds are, the strikers are going to improve. Johnny and I train together frequently, so of course he's made me better."

He glances over to Johnny, who is smiling back at him. A wicked grin that is brighter than any of the cameras going off in front of them.

“I knew you liked me” Johnny whispered, before turning back to the journalists.

—

@KateyKats

I'm sorry but if someone looked at me the way John MacTavish looked at Simon Riley I would simply combust

@FoodandFootball

Replying to @KateyKats: YES OMG and the Way SIMON CUT OFF THAT REPORTER!! SIR YOU ARE IN LOVE

@SamOnThePitch

See the moment Simon Riley LOSES IT at a reporter. HOW WILL MANCHESTER SOLDIERS RESPOND

@ManchestwhoreFC

Just found out people are shipping Simon Riley and John MacTavish, like... unironically. Yall know they're real people right?

@Goals4Gaz

Simon saying that John 'makes him better' and shutting down shitty reporters meanwhile I cant even get a guy to text me back.

@CasualCherryWineEnjoyer

Okay but like did it ever get revealed why John left his old team? Seems weird that he doesn't want to talk about it.

@SimonRileysleftasscheek

I missed it the first time but the fact that SIMON CALLS JOHN JOHNNY ASDSHJFK.

Chapter End Notes

If you follow me on twitter, You might have seen that I was struggling with this one for a bit. I'm still not 100% on it, but it just means I have things to work on next chapter.

If you want to follow me on twitter, you can do so [here!](#)

Also I am once again going to extend the chapter count

Substitute

Chapter by [skerryB](#)

Chapter Summary

Johnny wakes up, and Simon has an awakening

Chapter Notes

Content Warnings for this chapter

Mentions of Simon's shitty dad. Mentions of cancer. very slight mentions of murder (planned, nothing actually happened.) If i've missed something let me know

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

John wakes in an unfamiliar bed in an unfamiliar room to an even more unfamiliar weight over his waist. He squints, eyes adjusting to the darkness. The window across from him reveals nothing but his own reflection, the sky outside too dark to offer any enlightenment in terms of Johnny's current situation.

He did his best to move silently, sliding the mysterious man's arm slowly off of him so as not to disturb him. Once he was free, and his eyes had adjusted to the darkness more, he took in his partner's features. Shaved head. Built like a brick shithouse. Neck tattoo of a flower. All of these details worked to help Johnny put together a picture of what happened last night.

He'd been out drinking, chatting to the bartender about the whiskey they had in stock, complaining that it wasn't proper Scotch, when he'd felt the hand on the small of his back.

Jack, he said his name was, or maybe it was Josh. All Johnny knew is that he was handsome, and forward in a way he hadn't had in a long time. And he offered to take Johnny back to his place, rather than just take what he wanted in the alley behind the bar, or, when they were feeling particularly fancy, a sleazy motel close by.

But no, Jack/Josh had taken him home, walked him up the cramped stairs of his flat, and taken Johnny to bed. It was nice. He had even given Johnny a blow job after he fucked him, ensuring that Johnny had *one* orgasm to his name before rolling over and proceeding to pass out.

So now, here he was, several hours before daylight, in a stranger's bed, with a phone that, after a quick check, barely had enough battery to uber home. At least the wait wouldn't be long, the nearest driver a few measly minutes down the road. Just enough time for Johnny to put his clothes on and be waiting outside the front door. He's half tempted to leave his number for the guy, after all, it wasn't every day that his casual sex partners are charitable enough to make sure he comes. In the end, he decides not to, partially because the sex hadn't been *that good*, and partially because he wasn't certain on the guy's name.

-

While he waited on the street, bundled in the bomber jacket he'd worn the night before, he thumbed through the notifications on his phone. A message from his mother, checking in, which he would make an effort to reply to when it wasn't in the ass crack of dawn. And a few, surprisingly, from Simon.

The first was a picture of Joseph, taken from behind. A fresh mohawk adorning his head. It looked good, the slight curl in Joseph's hair adding a natural volume that Johnny was only able to achieve with product, when he was willing to put in the effort. He was even wearing a MacTavish jersey, the shoulders loose on him, the hem almost hitting the lad's knees.

The second picture was a selfie, Joseph and Simon, faces so close that their cheeks were touching. Joseph had a wide grin, and he appeared to be waving at the camera. Simon even had a small smile, barely causing a crease on his cheek. But Johnny could see a warmth in Simon's eyes, a sign that he wasn't completely unhappy about posing for the photo.

Simon Riley

> Joseph INSISTED that I send you pictures of his new haircut.

Johnny couldn't help but reply to that one, time be damned.

John

> He looks bonnie! Almost better than me.

As his uber pulls up, a slightly beat up Mazda, John feels his phone vibrate again

Simon Riley

> Apparently it was his first hair cut he didn't cry at.

John

> Atta boy.

> Also, why are you awake right now? It's the middle of the night

Simon Riley

> Don't exaggerate, it's very early morning

John

> Still, Why are you awake?

Simon Riley

> Gone for a run.

And *oh*; that made sense now.

John

> How far have you run so far?

Simon Riley

> Few Ks. I'm on the return route now.

> What about you?

John

> What about me?

Simon Riley

> Why are you awake?

John

> Can't say, you'll judge me.

Johnny thinks back to that time in the locker room; To Simon's genuine anger at seeing Johnny with hickeys.

Simon Riley

> Why? you murder someone? Taking a late-night stroll to get rid of the evidence?

John

> No

> But also, if I had, I wouldn't confess over text

> Besides, what if you're a cop

Simon Riley

> I can assure you, I'm not a cop.

John

> that's exactly what a cop would say.
> Convince me you're not a cop.

Simon Riley

> And how would I do that?

John

> confess to something that a cop wouldn't admit to.

Simon Riley

> Let me think.

The uber stops, and John looks up, it's the house he put in. A few blocks away from his actual house. Far enough to give the illusion of privacy, while close enough to not be a major inconvenience. His phone buzzes in his hand.

Simon Riley

> When I was a teenager I bought a knife specifically for killing my father.

John

> Holy Shit Si
> Did you do it?

Simon Riley

> No, chickened out and then the bastard got diagnosed with Cancer a few years later. Was dead within eight months.
> I assume I don't need to tell you to keep that to yourself?

John

> Secret's safe with me.

Simon Riley

> Now answer my question

John

> What question?

Simon Riley

> Why are you out this late?

John

> Ah
> Promise you won't judge?

Simon Riley

> I promise

John

> Good ol' fashioned walk of shame.

Simon Riley

> I see.

> Get home safe?

John

> Ye. Walking through front door now. <

Simon Riley

> Good.

> Make sure you get some rest. Arsenal are going to play hard and fast tomorrow

John

> Will do Cap.

> Oh, And Si?

Simon Riley

> Yes?

John

> If you did end up killing your old man, I would have helped you with the body

Simon Riley

> Thanks Johnny. Go to sleep.

—

Simon was right. Arsenal played fast and hard. And rough. Rudy had taken a dirty tackle that the ref hadn't noticed, and then Alejandro had earned himself a red card arguing with the ref over it, forcing them to be down a man for the entire second half. Overall, it had been a shit show. Even Johnny had played worse than normal, wrung out by the constant barrage of rapid attackers that managed to worm their way past the defenders. It had to have been brutal to watch, and the fans had made their disappointment clear with the chants and jeers.

They're in the locker room after the game. Most of the lights are turned off, and distantly, Simon can hear the squeaky wheels of the cleaners' trolley in the hallway. The rest of the team was long gone, scattered to the wind to be with their wives and girlfriends and friends

and loved ones, except for Him and Johnny. Simon knew Johnny had family back in Scotland, who he apparently video called regularly.

So, it was likely that Johnny, much like Simon, would be going home to an empty house tonight. He could see bruises on Johnny's neck, likely from the 'Walk of Shame' Johnny had confessed to in their last text exchange. At least he'd done more to hide it, wearing an undershirt that covered most of his neck.

“You’re staring again Si” John said, reaching under the water of Simon’s mind and pulling him to the surface. “What’s on your mind?”

Simon shrugs. “Just thinkin’” he replies. “You don’t have anyone back at yours, do you?”

“Nae” John answers. “Just me an’ my Scotch and my shitty reality tv”

“Don’t you ever get lonely?”

Now it’s Johnny’s time to shrug. “Not really. I don’t really do relationships.”

Just one night stands then Simon thinks to himself

Simon nods. It felt wrong. Someone like Johnny, who was able to light up any room, deserved someone that gave him even half the amount of warmth that he was able to give the team.

“Well, if you ever want to come round, you’re welcome to” Simon says.

Johnny considers it for a moment. “You sure Beth wouldn’t mind? Probably can do without me encroachin’ on her space?”

Simon pauses, confused “Beth doesn’t live with me?”

“Oh. I’m sorry” Johnny replies. “I just thought, since she wore a ring on her finger, that you two were married. Are you separated or did you never get married after Jo was born?”

Simon can feel his eyebrows crease. “What are you talking about?”

“Well since You and Beth had a kid together, I assumed you lived together and-”

“Beth is my sister-in-law”

Simon can see the moment Johnny processes his words, sees the moment his face turns to shock, to disgust, to *anger* “YOU HAD A KID WITH YOUR SISTER-IN-LAW. SIMON!”

Simon can feel himself getting defensive. Can feel the start of his flight or fight response shifting below his skin. *Focus* He thinks to himself. *It's not him*

“What the fuck are you talking about Johnny? Joseph isn’t my kid!”

“Are ye pullin’ my leg, he’s the spittin image of ye!” And oh, Simon should not be enjoying how Johnny’s accent gets thicker as he’s yelling.

“He’s the *spitting image* of my brother. His father” Simon answers. He pulls out his phone, pulls up a photo from last Christmas. Simon on one side of his mother, Tommy and Beth on the other, a criminally tiny Joseph resting in Tommy’s arms. “See?”

Johnny squints at the photo.

“So he’s not your kid?” Johnny asks

“No” Simon answered “If something ever happens to Tommy and Beth, they’ve asked me to take him” Simon confesses, forcing the thought out of his head because that’s not a trail of thought he wants to go down right now. “But no, he’s my nephew”

Simon watches as Johnny mouths the word, the frown in his brow softening slightly, a physical reflection of the confusion leaving his mind. “You have a brother?”

Simon nods, pointing to the picture on his phone again. “Tommy, He’s six years younger than me.”

"Oh. So, you're single?"

"I am" Simon answers.

"That's a shame. You should have gals out the door"

"Not my scene" Simon replies, the confession on the tip of his tongue, a little too close to comfort.

"Right" John answers. Simon can tell it's mostly to fill the silence between them.

"I'm sorry I thought that ye and Beth were together" Johnny says, after the silence between them grows longer.

"It's fine. I would have corrected you if I knew you had the impression"

"Still. You're great with Jo. You'd be a great father"

Simon snorts at that, "I disagree with you Johnny, but I won't try and convince you"

"Because you won't be able to Si" Johnny says, smiling. It's a real smile too, one that lights up his face and the room and makes Simon forget about the one-four defeat they just suffered. He would bottle it, if he could. Store it on his bedside table in a jar, open the lid to let a little bit of light leak out on the particularly dark nights.

It hits him, in that moment, like a football straight to the face, how completely and utterly *gone* he is on John MacTavish.

Chapter End Notes

Fun fact for this chapter. originally I had it that Johnny was going to get red carded instead of Alejandro, but I googled the logisitcs of what happens if a goalie gets red carded and it was too complicated for me to figure outt, plus I like the implication of Alejandro sticking up for his man.

If you want to come scream about This fic, or the latest season of Ted Lasso, please hit me up on twitter [here!](#)

EDIT: The formatting on this ended up screwing up. I think I've fixed it, but if you notice anything off pls let me know :)

Artefact 1

Chapter by [skerryB](#)

Chapter Summary

A little interlude to build the world a bit more. This was me putting on my little Trent Crimm hat like the gender envious queer that I am.

Chapter Notes

Content warning- VERY brief mentions of death (non main character)

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Off to War: The Manchester Soldier's Fight to the Top.
By Seth Gunnerson

Four years ago, The Manchester Solders were a mid-tier team with a captain that was either “Past his prime” or “F*****g geriatric”, depending on who you asked. They were barely hanging on to their spot in the middle of the pack, destined to remain below the champions, but above the line of deregulation. Now, they’re playing amongst the best. Holding their own against the Goliaths in the league. So, what happened?

Like most things, it happened slowly, then all at once. A fresh face here and there. Kyle Garrick, a rookie from their academy team. Alejandro Vargas and Rodolfo Parra, a pair that are so tied together from their times playing Mexican Street Football that they only agreed to offers that guaranteed them playing on the same team. Alex Keller, a goalkeeper from America that held his own against the European giants. Simon Riley, a striker that came out of nowhere like a phantom and quickly proved himself to be one of the greatest of his generation.

The team was coming together, building Strong pieces. Slowly.

Then the all at once hit.

I remember the game. I remember being in the stands as a wide-eyed university student. I’d always admired the Manchester Soldiers. I, like every other boy in the Country, had a Price Poster on my bedroom wall, his jersey in my own wardrobe. I’d cheered his name and waved

my flag and celebrated with my brothers and sisters in arms.

Seeing him go down on the pitch was devastating. The minutes that passed afterwards, waiting for him to get up again, were even worse. Just like that. Twenty years of football come to a screeching halt. Seeing the players huddle around their captain, shielding him from the cameras as paramedics treated him, gave him CPR, was scorched in the eyes of thousands of us. Even four years on, if you google John Price, the top results are photos from that day.

It was the lowest point of Manchester Soldiers FC.

And four years later, like a phoenix, the team has risen from the darkest day in club history. So how did that happen?

First off, Price announced his retirement. It shouldn't have surprised anyone, but still went down like swallowing glass. He had announced it in a press conference, saying, quite morbidly, that he would die a part of the Manchester Soldiers. The Coach's position was an obvious choice.

Then, in a move no one was expecting, he named Simon Riley his Captain.

The resounding reaction from everyone was 'Why?' followed shortly afterwards by a "No seriously Price, what are you thinking?". But eventually, it started making sense. Riley was a strong leader. He showed he was quick thinking, and able to negotiate with Referees and the press. The players on the team seemed to look up to him, even those that were older and had the absolute right to be envious of his position of leadership. But the thing about Simon Riley that makes him a great leader, is the sheer aura he gives off of not wanting the leadership position. Captains throughout the League rise to the spotlight, love to bask in the glory and fame that came with being the face of an organisation, but not Simon Riley. Simon Riley shrugs it off. Every time he does an interview or has a camera in his face, he gives the impression of wanting to be anywhere else. Which is exactly why he's the perfect man for the job.

And now, four years on, the team is finally seeing the fruits of their labour. Their latest addition is only further proof of that. John MacTavish is one of the best goalkeepers in the league. He'd served three years with the Sheffield Wanderers, and was showing signs of becoming a legacy player in the organisation. Their mutual parting of ways earlier this year had been a sudden shock, a surprise to everyone

except those in the room where it happened. Even more shocking was his sudden signing to Manchester, three days after facing up against him.

Simon Riley himself has gone on record stating that their recent success is due to MacTavish, stating “[of course] he's made me better” as if it's the most obvious thing in the world. It's that respect for his teammate, emphasising their strengths, that makes Simon Riley a strong leader, and the team he leads stronger as a result.

Personally, as a ManSol fan, as a former wide-eyed kid in a John Price jersey, I look at Simon Riley with respect. As a journalist, I am full of speculation. So much of this team is up in the air, hidden behind office doors and private conversations, the number of unknown and unanswered questions growing every week. What did Price see in Simon Riley four years ago that made him choose him for the armband? Why did MacTavish leave Sheffield? How did Price secure him so instantly? Will The Soldiers be able to maintain this momentum for the rest of the season? What will be their downfall?

It's these questions, and many we still do not know, that make football interesting. I, along with many others, will be watching to see if any of these answers are revealed.

Chapter End Notes

In researching this chapter, I googled the FIFA SDR (Fifa sudden death report) as well as a wikipeddia article about football players that had diedwhile playing. It was a pretty brutal, but genuinely interesting, read.

If you want to follow me on twitter, you can do so [here!](#)

Home Field Advantage

Chapter by [skerryB](#)

Chapter Summary

I am once again in a battle between The growing Chapter count, and my ever shortening list of Football terms I can use to name chapters

Chapter Notes

Content warning for this chapter. Very Very brief mention of Simon's father that may be read as neglect

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

The screen in front of Simon was a blur of colours. Joseph was sitting on the couch, feet tucked under Simon's leg, eyes glued to the tv.

"So, which one are you?" Simon asked.

"I'm the red team"

"But which red one"

Joseph let out a sigh, far too long suffering to be coming from an eight-year-old. "I'm all of the red ones. I'm playing as the whole team. You know this uncle Si"

Simon nods. "And what team are you playing as?"

"The red one," Joseph answered.

"What red one? There's loads of red teams."

Joseph lets out another sigh. "It's Sheffield, Uncle Si. I always play as Sheffield."

"Right," Simon replies. "So who's the team in Blue?"

"That's Man Sol. See, the blond one is you" And Simon squints at the screen, can see the smaller, digital version of himself intercept a pass from a Sheffield player and run with it to the goal.

"So I'm about to score?"

Simon watches as the little man dukes past a defender, and kicks the ball. It connects to the gloves of another tiny player, the red jersey and unfortunate haircut all too familiar. Simon swears that, despite the scale they were working with, they managed to capture Johnny's smarmy smirk perfectly.

"It's impossible. They coded it into the game that if You shoot on to MacTavish, it doesn't go in. Neat huh?"

Simon hums in response, leans back into the plush couch. Joseph, seemingly satisfied that Simon will not ask any other questions, turns his attention back to his game.

Simon is scrolling through his emails, reading about a sponsor that Laswell and he had discussed in passing, but hadn't fully finalised, He pulls it out, sees that it's a message from Johnny.

Johnny

> Want to hang out, I'm off my tits bored rn

Simon

> Tommy and Beth have date night, so I'm watching Joseph at mine. You're free to come round though?

Johnny

> You sure? Hate to ruin uncle-nephew night

Simon

> I've said it before and I meant it Johnny. You're welcome anytime.

Johnny

> Text me the address, I'll be there soon

> thanks Si

Simon shoots off the address, before pocketing his phone and turning his attention to Joseph. He had a textbook look of concentration. Brow scrunched together, tongue sticking out slightly. He looked so much like Tommy had done at his age, hunched over the dining table doing his maths work that Simon had helped him with, their father too blitzed to do anything but snore on the couch, and their mother picking up extra shifts at the cafe she worked out.

Moments like these with Joseph made him realise how much he'd missed out on, in his own childhood. How quickly he'd had to grow up, to fight for his survival. To fight for Tommy's survival. He tried not to, but there were times where he couldn't help but feel envious of

Joseph, of the life he got to live. Of the childhood he got to have that he and Tommy didn't.

He heard a ping on his phone, his security camera outside detecting movement. Pulling up the feed, Simon saw a car pulling away, Johnny approaching the door. A moment later, the doorbell echoed through the house.

"Who's that?" Joseph asked, not looking away from his game. Sheffield were up by 3, with seven minutes left of extra time. If Simon had to guess, it would be a wash.

"Why don't you go check?" Simon responded.

With a groan, Joseph paused his game and stood. Simon listened as his footsteps trailed away to the front door. After a moment, the door clicked open. Then, a moment of silence. Then, a scream that Simon could only describe as 'unrestrained excitement'

"Good to see you too lad" Simon heard Johnny say, the humour evident in his voice. The two return to the living room, and Simon looks over to see Joseph practically vibrating out of his socks.

"Uncle Si, Johnny's here" He exclaims, gesturing to the man next to him.

"I can see that" Simon responds. He's very quickly ignored though, Joseph instead giving Johnny his undivided attention.

"Why're you here? Did you know I was here? Do you want to play Fifa? Si doesn't play Fifa because he says it's weird but I think you would like it. Do you want to see my team? I play as Sheffield, but only because they haven't updated it to have you play for Manchester yet."

"Joseph, take a breath" Simon said, pulling his nephew out of the spiral of excitement.

John kneels down so that he can be eye level with Joseph. "I'll play fifa with you". He offers the boy a wide smile, and Simon is once again flooded with the warmth in his chest that he wishes so fucking badly was heartburn instead of this stupid infatuation he had developed for his goal keeper.

Joseph cheers, immediately going to the tv console and rummaging through one of the drawers for the second controller. While he's

hunched over, elbows deep in his search, Johnny leans closer.

"I hope that this is okay" he says, voice hushed so that Joseph doesn't hear him. Simon has to stop himself from shivering at the soft voice against his ear.

"It's fine," Simon responds. "He's been begging me to play, but it's not really my thing"

"Why not?"

"It just feels weird, you know? Pretending to be myself, or as people I know. Controlling them like some word god complex." He pauses for a moment, glances to make sure Joseph hasn't fallen into the drawer and disappeared forever. "I'm also not very good at it. Keep pressing the wrong buttons. I get too frustrated to play with Joseph." As he speaks, he can feel his voice getting softer, more timid.

John laughs at that, throwing his head back to expose the long line of his throat, the angle of his jaw, the slight curve of his ear. Simon gets the urge to *bite* him.

That urge, along with several others Simon would be taking to the grave, flared several more times throughout the night. Once, When Johnny had made a joke that had Joseph literally rolling on the floor with laughter. He'd looked up to Simon, from where he was sitting on the floor next to Joseph, and beamed at him. Simon had to hold himself back from kissing him, instead forcing himself to offer a small smile back in return.

He'd had to restrain himself again when, after spending twenty minutes fighting the drop of his eyelids, Joseph fell asleep against Johnny's arm. Johnny had gone stock still when he noticed, not wanting to disturb the sleeping child. He'd looked down at Joseph, and the pure adoration he had on his face almost made Simon's knees buckle underneath him when he stood to gather Joseph in his arms.

"Alright Tiger, let's get you to bed" Simon had said, softly. Joseph had made a soft whine in protest, but relaxed into Simon's hold as he climbed the stairs to the guest bedroom that Joseph claimed on nights like these.

They had a pretty consistent night time routine. Simon tucking Joseph in, then dropping to the floor to check under the bed with a "Still no monsters, you're good" before leaning forward to brush a loose curl off of Joseph's forehead and kiss it goodnight.

"Uncle Si?" Joseph asks, his voice cutting through the delicate silence in the room

"Yeah bud?"

"Are you and Johnny friends?"

Simon pauses for a moment, considering the question. *Were they?*

"We're teammates," Simon answers. "We hang out together. I think we're friends"

"I hope you are," Joseph says, his voice laced with sleep. A few more minutes and he'd be out like a light.

He waits until Joseph's breathing evens out, the rise and fall of his chest underneath the blue quilt the only movement on his tiny frame, before carefully leaving the room and slowly closing the door, turning the handle slowly so it doesn't make a noise as it latches.

Standing in the hallway, examining a poster of a painting of a seascape Simon had bought from an art market several years ago, was Johnny. He was concentrating, as if the swirls of blended blues and greys and pale yellows held the answers to all of his problems. For a moment, all Simon could do was stand next to him and stare at the art print.

"Turner" Johnny says, glancing towards Simon.

"Hmm?"

"The painting. The original is by Turner. You can tell because of the haziness to it. And the movement. It's very Turner"

"Sure. I just got it to fill the wall. This is the longest I've spent looking at it"

"It's a good piece. I like his landscapes better though. His farm scenes with the wee cows" Johnny shifts his weight as he speaks. Folds his arms over his chest and then immediately drops them to his sides. He's restless, Simon thinks.

"I'll keep that in mind next time I have to pick a painting for my wall."

"If you want a new painting you can have one of mine"

"You paint?" Simon asks, genuinely surprised. Johnny didn't seem like

he had the patience for anything that took longer than a standard football game.

"Ay, My Ma was an artist. Broke her heart when I took up football instead of getting a creative career. I keep a sketchbook sometimes, and during the offseason I work on bigger pieces." Johnny shrugs, and Simon gets the impression that he's embarrassed. Of what, he's not sure

"What about you? Do you have any hobbies?"

Simon thinks for a moment. "Just football."

"Ach, you're boring." Johnny teases. After a moment of companionable silence, Simon hears Johnny rustle to turn to face him. "You know I think we're friends, right?"

"What?"

"I heard you with Joseph, when he asked you if we were friends. I think we are." Johnny says. "Even though you think I'm a prick."

"I don't think you are a prick." At that, Johnny arches a brow, a clear sign of doubt. Simon can feel himself getting defensive, and has to tamp down the urge to grab Johnny and shake him by the shoulders. "I used to, but not anymore"

"Sure" Johnny answers

"Besides, someone who's a prick wouldn't play Fifa with my nephew for two hours straight."

Johnny laughs at that, a breathy undertone that Simon thinks is quieter than normal because Joseph is sleeping on the other side of the door behind Simon.

They need to move, Simon thinks. They've been standing in this hallway for far too long. "You want a drink? I've probably got some Scotch somewhere on the bar cart"

"If you're offering," Johnny says. He reaches out to the Turner print one last time, traces the choppy horizon line with a delicate touch, before he moves to lead Simon downstairs back to the living room. It's about halfway down that Simon notices that Johnny is walking on tip toes, making an effort to silence his footfalls so as not to wake Joseph. Another example of how Simon's first assessment on Johnny had been

wrong.

—
"Can I ask you a question Johnny?"

John looks up at Simon. He's got a glass halfway to his mouth, the amber bourbon a similar shade of caramelised honey that Simon's eyes get in the sunlight. There's a warmth there, in his eyes and, based on the pink that is sitting high on Simon's cheeks, the rest of his face.

Johnny nods in response. They'd been shooting the shit for the past couple of hours now. Discussing everything from their next match up, to drills Price had them run, to the ridiculous rumours they'd heard about past teammates. Simon had even asked John about his art, sending him on a long-winded tirade about the merits of oil paint over watercolours. Normally, when he got himself lost in one of these rants, the person he was speaking to would clearly zone out, or cut him off, or change the subject to something more interesting.

Simon, on the other hand, had seemed...genuinely interested? He asked questions relevant to what John had previously said, as though he was connecting his (apparently limited) art knowledge to the new information Johnny was sharing with him.

John wanted to kiss him. Wanted to crawl into his lap and show him how much his attention meant to him. Wanted to spend hours together, simply learning Simon's interests and hobbies and making Simon smile in a way that made his whole face light up.

Instead, he remained seated. Grips the glass a little tighter, and takes another sip of the Scotch Simon had been able to dig out from the back of his liquor cabinet. It was smooth, and had a flavour that didn't quite burn, but definitely warmed his throat and mouth as he swallowed.

"Go on then."

"Why did you leave Sheffield?"

John feels the warmth in his throat instantly go cold; Instantly felt it solidify into gravel or concrete or a boulder the size of a tennis ball. He forces himself to swallow. It's either that or cough up the past three drinks all over Simon's coffee table.

"You don't know?" Johnny asks, surprised. Why, he's unsure. There's

no way Simon would know. "They bought out my contract." He blinks, and all he can see is the gaze of the man in the pictures, his hands fisting the Scottish flag scarf his mother made for him, and smirking at the camera that Johnny had had his back to, all those months ago.

He takes another sip of his whiskey, catching nothing but the remaining dregs and chunks of melted ice.

"Shit." Simon says. "What did you do?"

Johnny shrugs. "I can't say."

"Why not?"

Because it will ruin everything, Johnny thinks. You won't want me on your team, in your net, in your locker room. You won't let me near Joseph, or your family. Or your team. The rest of the team will hate me. You won't look at me the same way ever again. You won't want to be my friend.

Instead, Johnny shakes his head again, forces himself out of his spiral. "It's complicated"

Simon scoffs at that. He folds his arms over his chest. And then, as if he can hear Johnny's thoughts, his expression softens.

"Do you think you'll ever feel comfortable telling me?"

Johnny shrugs, blinking rapidly. God. He's pathetic, crying after two glasses of old Scotch on his Captains couch. The only reason he was here was because he couldn't handle sitting alone in his own flat, and knew he shouldn't hook up on a weeknight.

Simon reaches forward and places a steady hand on Johnny's knee. His touch is cool, the flesh of his palm and his fingers still cold from the ice in his drink. The slight dampness from the condensation on his glass leaking through the fabric of Johnny's jeans.

He shrugs again.

"Okay" Simon says, pulling his hand away. For a moment, John considers reaching out and grabbing Simon's wrist so that he stays, keeps his hand on John's knee as a solid reminder of their *friendship*

Instead, he moves to stand, stretching out his legs as he does so. "I best be going" he says, more to convince himself than to tell Simon. "See you at Practice tomorrow?"

Simon nods. He goes to see Johnny at the door, stands with him while he waits for his uber to arrive. “Thank you for coming around. Joseph loved seeing you” he says, watching the little car on Johnny’s screen get closer and closer to them.

“It’s a pleasure. He reminds me of my nephews, the wee rascals” As the car pulls up, John glances at Simon one last time. “Thanks for letting me come over, was going mental sitting at home”. He claps Simon on the bicep, the last form of physical contact he allows himself, lest he do something stupid, before turning and walking towards the car.

Chapter End Notes

If you want to follow me on twitter, you can do so [here!](#)

Goal Mouth Scramble

Chapter by [skerryB](#)

Chapter Notes

I have once again emerged from my hole (my real job) an bring you PLOT. Most of this chapter was written so long ago that to access the original dms I had to download my full twitter archive. (Shout out once again to Markie, who as some of you may have noticed, I listed as a co Creator, because this fic would not exist without them)

Content Warning- Brief Subtle Mention of Simon's father dying of Cancer. pls notice the updated tags

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Tommy

> So you and Johnny huh?

Simon R

> fuck off

Tommy

> Oh i hit a nerve. You must have it bad

Simon R

> Fuck off

Tommy

> No.

> Good to see Jo's rubbing off on you

Simon R

> I will actually kill you

Tommy

> No you wont. Bc then you'll go to prison and you wont be able to see your boyfriend again

Simon R

> He's not my boyfriend

Tommy

> You wish he was tho

Simon R

> I'm never babysitting Joseph ever again

Tommy

> Thats fine. Gives you and Johnny more time to kiss

> Or maybe I get Johnny to babysit. He seems like a chill guy

Simon R

> he's got better things to do

Tommy

> Like what? You?

Simon tossed his phone, watched it land softly on his sport bag nestled safely in the bunching of his joggers he would be wearing post-game. His pre-game press had gone well, the same generic shite he'd been dribbling for the past few years, but with a more upbeat tone that came with being in the higher end of the leak rankings. Hell, He might have even cracked a smile.

There was something that had awakened in him recently. Sure, winning helped. But even their rare recent draws or losses had him feeling light in his chest, as opposed to the crippling defeat and the guilt that followed when he was unable to lead his team to victory.

He knew what it would, but thinking it, or God forbid, even saying it out loud, would have him spiralling.

Instead, he laced up his boots, glanced around the locker room. Across from him, he could see Johnny doing the same. His hair had grown longer, as though Johnny hadn't bothered to get it cut. It suited him. Simon felt his fingers itch, and he knew the only thing that would sedate it is running his hand through Johnny's grown out mohawk.

Tommy was right: Simon did have it bad.

Simon can barely hear his own thoughts over the roar of the crowd, the crashing crescendo of cheers as the ball approaches their net, only for Johnny to intercept it at the last possible second.

Even from midfield, Simon could see Johnny's smirk, prideful as he drops the ball onto his laces and punts it in his direction.

Simon receives it, dodging over one of the defenders that went to tackle him. He could feel the studs in his boots digging into the dirt as he ran. A solid kick has it going towards Gaz, who had managed to slip his own defender and get into a good position near the penalty line. Not good enough to make a goal, but good enough to make the opposing team's defence scramble. Gaz lobed it back to Simon, who received it to his chest and sent it towards his foot, before booting it to the net. The whole exchange took less than thirteen seconds. The whole time, the crowd's jeers got louder, the roar reaching a crescendo as Simon's ball hit the back of the goal's net.

Simon could see the moment the goalie realised he hadn't made the save, the ball just out of reach. Johnny would have been able to make the save.

On the side of the field, he saw Price clapping, cheering on. He couldn't hear what Price was shouting, not from this distance, but the wide grin and thumbs up he shot Simon and Gaz made his mood clear.

Three minutes remaining. Their most recent goal had put them up by two. It would take a miracle for their opponents to get at least one ball past Johnny, let alone two.

Sure enough, ninety seconds later, One of the Chelsea midfielders made a run for it. They had managed to sneak it past Alejandro, who's attempt at interception had him stumbling, before their midfielder passed the ball to their forward, who passed it to another, who shot it directly into Johnny's gloves.

Around Him, the stadium erupted in cheers, a volcano of noise that almost drowned out the final whistle. He felt A sudden weight at his Side, Gaz launching himself at Simon in celebration, his arm slinging over Simon's shoulders.

Simon looked across the field, to their own goal, where Johnny was still holding the ball he had caught. He was turning it over in his hands, before looking up and meeting Simon's gaze.

—

@FootballDaily

Another solid win for The Manchester Soldiers has them rocketing up the league, but what does it mean for their opponents

@TomJohnJones

Fucking refs in the Man Sol vs Chelsea were so fucking biased ignoring like four off side calls just because Simon riley is the poster for the fucking Prem league fucking bullshit. Man needs to be taken down a peg

@AbmikiRii

Replying to @TomJohnJones: has it ever occurred to you that Simon Riley is the face of the league bc hes fucking good at football?

@StephanieNotStefany

John MacTavish when he goes for a jump and his shirt rides up a little bit and you can see the tummy SIR that is slut behaviour

@HotShotInNet

This game has me thinking about Simon Riley and Kyle Garrick Pacific Rim au once again. I s2g those who would be SO Drift compatible are you serious????

@AlejandroVargasHole

Replying to @HotShotInNet: YES OMG God The tension. Them fighting alongside AleRudy?? I am opening a word doc as we speak

@HotShotInNet

Replying to @AlejandroVargasHole: I am ♦♦♦♦♦

@WillowWillowWillow

Coach Price saw that MacTavish left his old team and already had adoption papers typed up and ready like yes omg that's His Son Now. Another one for the collection. This isn't premier League he's watching his BABY BOYS

Simon's hair is still damp. He can feel an occasional thick droplet of water trace along the nape of his neck and hit the collar of his t-shirt.

The locker room was a wash of chaos. Gaz had hoisted Roach onto his shoulders at some point, and was parading around the locker room. They were both shirtless, And Simon could see the trail of light brown hair that dusted Johnny's lower stomach. Part of him, the unchecked feral part of his brain, wanted to lick it. Wanted to sink his teeth into

the tender flesh above Johnny's hip bone and mark him up for the entire locker room to see-

"-Simon!" Price called out, shouting louder than normal to be heard over the jeers from the men in the room, "Can we have a word?"

Simon nods, does his best to lose his train of thought. The resounding "oooooooooh"s His teammates shoot him in that endeavour.

In the office, he takes a seat in the plus chair in front of Price's desk. In the corner, arms folded over her chest, is Laswell. There's a loose strand of hair hanging just over her left ear, which means it's a solid seven out of ten on the *Oh Shit* scale.

"What's this about?"

Price and Laswell share a glance. After a moment, Price speaks up.

"This email was sent to me twenty eight minutes ago.". He turns his laptop to Simon, who can only stare at the screen in front of him.

It's a series of grainy shots of Johnny at a bar with a stranger, a tall blond with glasses, which stirs something in Simon's gut. Possessiveness? Jealousy? They're handsy, Johnny pretty much pulling the blond stranger by the belt loops. There are other pictures in the series, Each more damning than the last. Johnny, pretty much in the guy's lap, grabbing at the collar of his shirt. Johnny, burying his face into the junction of the guy's shoulder and neck. Johnny, kissing the guy so ferociously that his entire tongue had to be down the guy's throat. The last one, taken outside in what appears to be the back alley of the bar, is the final nail in the coffin. Angled to show the back of Johnny's head and that stupid fucking mohawk, the image has the unnamed stranger looking down at Johnny, who is kneeling in front of him. Even from this distance, from this angle, it's clear what the two of them are doing.

Jesus fucking Christ.

"Why are you showing me these?" Simon asks, unable to look away, his eyes caught on the way the Stranger has his hands threaded in Johnny's mohawk.

"You're the Captain. You'll want to know what you're walking into tomorrow. They said they would leak this first thing in the morning."

"And we can't get them to change their minds?"

"They're demanding 10.4 million pounds for it. It's officially out of the budget."

"Why that number? it's so specific?"

Another sideways glance between Price to Laswell that Simon catches. They were having a silent discussion, or had already discussed it before Simon entered the room.

"It's what MacTavish's annual salary was last year, with his old team"

"Right. We can't afford that, can we?"

"I'm afraid not. Not after signing John's contract." There's weight behind Price words. For a moment, Simon is reminded of one of the doctors telling him of his father's condition, when they had pulled him aside from his mother and, though unneeded, delicately told him that there was nothing that they could do to save him.

This could ruin Johnny, and that realisation hits him harder than his father's death ever could.

"Does Johnny know about these?" Simon asks, finally looking away from the images to meet Price's gaze

"Not Yet, or if he does, he hasn't told us." John answers. "We think he would come to us for something like this"

Simon nods, even though he feels like it isn't 100% the truth. He had always had the impression that Johnny was hiding something from him. Was always on the cusp of telling him something, but then silencing himself at the last possible second.

He never would have thought it was this. Even if it was something he'd dreamed of. Not like this.

"Surely there's something we can do?" Simon says, looking between price, Laswell, and the blond man in the picture on the laptop.

"Well," Price says. "There is one thing..."

Simon looks at Price for a moment, stares at him, examining his expression for any sign of humour, any clue that this might be one big joke. He finds nothing of the sort, only the firm expression he'd seen twice before on John Price's face. Once, when he had retired, and once before that, several years ago when Simon had shown him a pixelated image that could have ruined Simon. Insurance, he had

called it, A promise to Price that Simon would be loyal to the team.

Simon thinks about it for a moment longer. He glances out of the coaches' window into the locker room, where the festivities are still going, and sees Johnny and Roach, wrestling on top of Rudy and Gaz's shoulders.

Simon turns back to Price and nods.

"Would it work?"

John looks at Simon. He holds his hands in front of him, clasped together, weight resting on his elbows. For a moment, it looks like he's praying, or saying grace at the table.

"We can make it work" he says, and Simon knows a promise when he hears it. "Are you sure about this?"

Simon glances back out to the locker room, and sees the triumphant expression on Johnny's face, head thrown back in laughter as he causes Roach to topple off of Gaz's shoulders. Simon can feel the warmth spreading in his stomach at his expression, at the pure joy on his face. In that moment, he knows he would burn the entire world down to keep it there.

"Whatever it takes." He says, turning back to his former captain, now coach. "Tomorrow?"

Price nods in return.

Chapter End Notes

If you want to follow me on twitter, you can do so [here!](#)

If you want to know what playsit the guys were listening to while celebrating their win, you can listen [here!](#)

Replacement

Chapter by [skerryB](#)

Chapter Notes

I couldn't end on a cliff hanger so heres the next chapter ahead of schedule. If you are reading this, PLEASE make sure that you've read the previous chapter

Content Warning for this chapter:

Internet Typical Homophobia, including one use of the 'p' Slur (it's in the tweet section)

Also there's some explicit content in this chapter, nothing too major, but its still there.

If I've forgotten to tag anything, please let me know

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Simon is still in bed when it happens, but he'd been tossing and turning for several hours, kept awake by the adrenaline that coursed through his body. Price, at the last minute, had changed their morning practice to an afternoon tape review, which the rest of the team had complained about. Simon, on the other hand, knew his reasoning. Price would need the morning free, Hell, he'd need a whole week, based on the bomb he and Simon dropped to the press. It had done its job though. The anonymous photographer was more than happy to exchange the pictures of Johnny for something *juicier* involving the League's golden boy.

He's held onto the footage for a while now. Had shared it with Price only after he realised he trusted him enough to let him know about it. Handed it to him on a usb drive several years ago, telling to keep it as insurance in case of an emergency. And this had been an emergency. The way Simon saw it, Johnny would be completely blindsided by this getting out. It would *ruin* Johnny.

Simo, on the other hand, knew he could take it. Knew the presence he brought to a room; the way players fell into step when he told them to. The team respected him, so did the press, way more than they respected MacTavish.

The first text came from Price at seven thirty-six in the morning. One

word. *Incoming*.

Simon set his alarm for eight hours from now, switched it to 'do not disturb' mode, and then proceeded to throw his phone to the other side of the room.

—

John is woken by his phone vibrating on the bedside table where it was plugged in, a constant stream of pings and buzzes that had seeped into his dreams and then pulled him into consciousness like a hand pulling him from a roaring ocean.

He blinked. Once. Twice. A third time, his bleary eyes adjusting to his phone's brightness, the source of the notifications lighting up his screen. The most recent message, a text sent to the team group chat from Gaz, had Johnny confused.

Gaz

> How did this get out?

John blinks again, before dimming the brightness on his screen so that it wasn't as blinding. He scrolled up through the chat, and found what appeared to be the first message of the day from Price.

Coach Price (Team Dad)

> Serious talk incoming. No Jokes.

> A video involving one of your teammates leaked today. I need you all to be radio silent on this. You are firmly on 'No Comments' until I or Laswell say otherwise.

> I mean it.

Oh Fuck. Johnny thinks. *Not again* . It can't be him. Surely Price would have spoken to him. Would have pulled him into the office and sent him packing just like the coaches at Sheffield. His phone buzzes again, reminding him that the chat was still open on his screen.

Gaz

> ???

> Did someone get their dick out on twitter?

Coach Price (Team Dad)

> Something like that. Old video got leaked.

> It's Simon.

Johnny is quick to open his web browser, types in the “Si” and clicks the first autocomplete suggestion. After taking a half second to load, Johnny’s screen is lit up with the basic info. A Wikipedia page, the team’s official website. A website dedicated to tracking Premier League stats. His thumb hovers for a moment, for switching over to the ‘news’ tab. The first headline is from *the Sun*.

“MANSOL CAPTAIN RILEY HANDLES DIFFERENT KIND OF BALL IN SHOCKING VIDEO”

Steaming fucking Jesus.

Johnny skims through the article itself, what looks to be almost a thousand words of dribbled shite that’s purely designed to fill the page and give the website more advertisement real estate. Towards the bottom, he finds what he’s looking for; ‘To see the full video for yourself. Click here’

Johnny hesitates. Does he need to see this? Does he want to see this? He thinks for a moment, what he would want if he was in Simon’s position right now. Would he want Johnny to watch the video?

Johnny thinks. Thinks about the yearning and want and desire and lust that he’s been pushing down since meeting Simon.

He clicks the link.

It opens to a video player. After a few seconds of buffering, the video opens to show an unfamiliar man, around Johnny’s age, Standing in front of a bathroom mirror. He looks to be holding an iPhone that’s almost a decade old. He’s wearing wide sunglasses that cover most of his face, and are wholly unnecessary in the dim room he’s standing in. He’s got dark hair that sits around his shoulders, a solid stomach of chiselled muscle, and the *thickest* cock Johnny has ever seen. The man is hard, jerking himself off in slow, lazy strokes, seemingly admiring his own reflection.

Johnny skips ahead, watches as the camera shifts, the man moving away from the mirror to the other side of the room. It looks like a hotel room, slightly classier than the kind that the team would book for away games.

After a moment, the camera stills, now focusing on the subject in the middle of the room. A younger Simon Riley, barely older than 20, with a mop of blond curls that graze against silver eyelashes that are highlighted by the light coming from one of the bedside tables. The

blond's eyes are closed, brow soft in relaxation, in bliss, as he focuses on the task at hand.

A younger Simon Riley, on his knees, sucking off the unknown man with a completely blissed out expression. Looking down at Simon, as if the man is holding it at his eye level, the angle is surprisingly flattering. It emphasizes his freckled cheekbones and crooked nose perfectly. The unknown man (boyfriend? Lover? One night stand?) is grasping a fistful of Simon's blond curls, completely controlling his pace.

The audio catches Johnny off guard. The slight slick sounds of oral sex are interspersed with Simon's choked off grunts that get louder as the man above him tightens his grip in Simon's hair.

Johnny feels sick.

The audio kicks up again, as the Simon on the screen lets out a moan that shoots Johnny in the lower gut, and suddenly Johnny can't watch anymore.

He feels shameful, as he closes off the tab, switching back to the group chat.

Gaz

> Are we still on for tape review this afternoon?

Coach Price (Team Dad)

> Yes. Tat may change though. I'll keep you posted.

Rudy

> Is Simon okay? I haven't been able to reach him. Keep getting sent straight to voicemail

Coach Price (Team Dad)

> I spoke to him when we first found out. He's on full radio silence for a few hours. He says he'll be at TR, but I trust you all to not hold it against him if that changes.

The message immediately gets thumbs-ed up by his team, a universal sign of agreement, and Johnny adds his own to the growing tally under Price's message.

It hits him then; Way later than it should have. Simon is Gay. Or at least, is willing to get on his knees for someone. That realisation alone has him spiralling.

@EUSPORTDAILY

Manchester Soldiers remain tight-lipped following Gay Scandal. What does it mean for the rest of their season

@BreakingGossipUK

Simon Riley, Captain of the Manchester Soldiers, Caught on tape with another man. How did his teammates react? Click here to find out.

@SarahfromIT

Replying to @BreakingGossipUK: I'll save yall the click, they reached out to the team, who have said they will not be answering questions at this time. Literally a nothing article.

@ManSolTillIDie

Okay seriously ManSol fandom what we aren't going to do is post the video to twitter. There's no way Simon consented to this, and sharing it just gives attention to the person that posted it. Which is exactly what that scumbag wants.

@ManSolTillIDie

Like Don't get me wrong, Simon Riley being queer is GREAT, But The choice to come out has been taken from him, and we need to respect that.

@SimonRileyleftasscheek

Okay but whos' going to talk about NOISES Simon makes while giving head. Imagine hearing him like that. He's such a whore. /Affectionate

@FlyingwithFlynn

Firmly of the opinion that if Simon didn't want the video getting out, he shouldn't have made it.

@Freeshavacadoo

Simon Riley gets all stone faced and stoic in front of the press cameras. Turns out all they needed to do was get him on his knees and he'd turn into the attention whore for the cameras.

@HeartandManSol

Would yall still follow me if I wrote a Soldiers fic where the team all runs a train on Simon in the locker room, bc my google doc is looking mighty tasty. And based on the length of the video, he's got the Stamina for it.

@ManInNet

Can't believe Simon Riley is a fucking poof. Time to support Manchester United instead.

@EatSleepFootballRepeat

Wait does this make Simon Riley the first gay out footballer

@MessyforMessi

Replying to @EatSleepFootballRepeat: Just because someone sucks a dick doesn't mean they're gay. Yall need to stop jumping to conclusions.

@AllenDexterPrivate

Can't help but feel sorry for the Manchester Soldiers right now.

@GregorywithFourGs

As a homosexual, I'm glad that Simon Riley is gay, but as a Chelsea fan, I'm still mad that he beat us last week.

@AmandaJonesTheNinth

I just woke up and all my European moots are losing their mind over one of their blorbos becoming canonically gay? Good for them I have no idea what show youre referencing though. #LoveWins

@StephanienotStefany

Replying to @AmandaJonesTheNinth: Bestie omg hes a real man

@AmandaJonesTheNinth

Replying to @StephanieNotStefany: yes babe live your truth, Your Blorbos are real if they live in your heart <3

Just as Johnny's getting ready to leave, he gets a notification on the phone. Gaz had offered to drive him to Price's house Where tape review was taking place, Since the paparazzi had swarmed apparently

swarmed their facility.

Gaz

> I'm here. Your neighbour keeps glaring at me.

John leaves his flat, locking the door behind him. Over the short fence, he can see his neighbour Mildred, watering can in hand, glaring at the Maserati pulled up in front of John's flat

"It's because she hates Italian cars, thinks they're the downfall of British society or some shite like that," John explains as he climbs into the passenger seat of Gaz's car.

Gaz laughs as he pulls out onto the road. "Fuckin Boomers."

John laughs in reply, but it feels a little forced. The silence lasts for about ten more seconds, and each one of them is hell for Johnny. He shifts in his seat, before breaking it.

"Have you talked to Simon today?" he asks

Gaz doesn't look away from the road as he responds. "I shot him a text but haven't got a response yet. You?"

John shakes his head in reply. He had tried. Had stared at their text chat, had spent almost twenty minutes typing, backspacing, typing. In the end, he had given up. He didn't know the words Simon needed right now, didn't know if Simon would even see them. Would even want them. He could imagine that Simon's notifications would be a little crowded at the moment.

"Did you know that he was... You know?"

"Into dudes?" Gaz asked. "Didn't have a clue. Honestly mate, the idea of Simon dating anyone is... odd, you know? He's just Simon."

Johnny hums in agreement. He could see where Gaz was coming from.

"Did you watch it?" Gaz asks.

"No" Johnny says, maybe a little bit too quickly. If Gaz doesn't believe him, it doesn't show on his face.

"I watched a little, just to see that it was actually Simon, and not some deep fake editing bullshit." Gaz says. "The whole thing is almost an hour long. No way I was sitting through that."

“Do you think he’ll be okay?” John asks.

“I don’t know,” Gaz says. He indicates to turn, comes to a wrought iron gate held open by a heavy pot plant. Price was expecting them. “If anyone could handle it though, it’s Simon. I’m more worried about the team”

“Ye think they’ll give him trouble?”

“Not if they know what’s good for them.” Gaz says, and Johnny can see the way his fists clench the steering wheel. He appreciates it. Appreciates that he won’t be the only one coming to blows for Simon if he needs to.

Simon doesn’t even knock in the door. Price had told him that it would be unlocked. He steadies himself. Takes a deep breath in through his nose. Counts the panes of glass on Price’s front door (eight in total, Two small ones on the door itself, and six in the wider frame). Lets out the breath through his mouth. Game time.

When he opens the door, the light murmuring goes silent, All the heads in the room turn to face him.

“Alright.” He says. He’d rehearsed what he was going to say in the drive over, but now that he was here, in front of the team, he was coming up blank. So, it seemed, were his teammates.

Before he could stop himself, his eyes went to Johnny. He searched the keeper’s face for anything. Disgust. Fear. Anger. Hatred. Anything that would tell Simon what Johnny was feeling. Instead, he saw something worse. Sympathy.

“Alright” he says, again, cutting through the silence like a knife. “Go on.”

The Team, *His* team, stare back at him. Occasionally one would blink, and it reminded him of when Joseph was a baby, staring up at him without comprehending a single word Simon had said to the infant in his arms.

Rudy is the first to break the silence. “Simon... Do you want to talk about it?”

Simon shrugs in reply, buries his hands in the front pocket of his

hoodie. “Not much to say. It’s an old video.”

Alejandro speaks up next “The guy in the video, is he your-”

“-He was an old PR guy for one of my junior league teams.” Simon says. “He’s irrelevant now.”

“Alright. Simon, take a seat.” John says. As he speaks, he gestures to the only open space on the couch, right on the end, next to Johnny. Great.

“Few things. We have a press conference tomorrow. Kate, Simon and I will be there, but we’d like one or two of you to be there too. Shows the public that you are-” He pauses, looking for the right word “-Standing with your captain, so to speak. If it was just Simon, they might try to spin it as a disciplinary thing.”

“I’ll do it,” Johnny says. Simon glances toward him, and Johnny’s eyes meet his gaze. That same blue that made Simon feel like he was drowning, all the air in his lungs escaping him were staring back at him.

“I’ll be there too,” Gaz says from the other side of Johnny.

Price nods. “Great. Now, in terms of social media, all of you are on a twenty-four-hour black out. No tweets. No Instagram. No TikTok. No whatever bullshit websites the kids are using these days.” Price pauses, looking around the room for signs of protest. Finding none, he continues. “We’ll have some official statements up on the team social media soon, and you are welcome to respond to those if you want, but you have to have it cleared by me or Kate before you post it. Also. If you get the urge to respond to any negative comments, or reach out to the press, or God forbid say something homophobic, or do anything that goes against the instructions I have just given you, you will be benched for the rest of the season. Does that make sense to you all?”

There’s a resounding shout of “Yes Coach” That Simon doesn’t feel the need to participate in.

“Now, with that out of the way. Tape review. I want you all to focus on the connections we were making in the last game. Where are our blind spots? Our Dead zones? Defenders, I want you all to pay attention to when you might be blocking MacTavish’s sight lines.” And with that, John presses play on the remote Simon hadn’t realised he was holding, and the footage on the screen, their most recent game against Chelsea, comes to life.

Simon leans in close to John. “Thanks for agreeing to do the press thing” He whispers. “It’s going to be a ball ache”

“Donnae worry about it,” Johnny whispers in return. “You’d do the same for me if I needed you to”

Simon shifts so his eyes are on the screen, watches the Reyes from a few days ago pass the ball to Rudy, a good connection. It hits him as he’s watching that Johnny’s right. There’s a lot of the things Simon would do if Johnny needed him to. More than Johnny knows.

It’s how he got here in the first place, after all.

Chapter End Notes

As always, you can come hang with me on twitter [here!](#)

Also FYi I may need to update the chapter count again

Counter-Press

Chapter by [skerryB](#)

Chapter Summary

The long awaited press conference

Chapter Notes

Content Warning for this chapter

-Discussions of homophobia, including one use of the f-slur

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

The Press room is a mess when Johnny and the others enter. So many people that seats have been abandoned in favour of making more space available, even then, people are still crammed up against the wall, with a few late arrivals spilling out into the corridor. There's a swarm when they enter, a thousand flashbangs of camera clicks almost blinding as Johnny and the team approach the table. The table is piled with mobile phones and audio recorders waiting to capture their statement and turn into a soundbite that will be heard around English, Possibly the entire world.

It doesn't escape Johnny how much weight was on him right now. Laswell had sat him and Gaz down and told them as much earlier. Locker rooms around the world would be looking at Johnny and Gaz as a framework on how to engage with their queer teammates. According to Laswell, they had the potential for real change. What Simon was doing was big, but their role in this was equally important. People, Laswell had continued, needed to see that it was something *normal*

Johnny had excused himself shortly after that meeting. Had snuck into the kit room and hid behind a pile of game-worn jerseys that their kitman König was yet to wash, put his head between his knees, and breathed deeply for several moments. He'd also phoned his mum, had a good long chat about everything from their last game to his mother's tomato crops, to some football award his nephew had won. He even, after checking that the door was locked, talked about the minor definitely not completely consuming crush he has on his Captain, and how the recent revelation had made it a *possibility* instead of a farfetched fantasy. How there was a non-zero chance that if Johnny

ever got the courage to kiss him, Simon wouldn't immediately sock him in the jaw.

His mother, unhelpfully, had laughed at him, a full belly melody that echoed over the phone and struck him down with a wave of homesickness. She had told him to stop 'runnin' your mind in pure circles till the cows come home' and to 'just kiss the beefy fool'. She had a knack for telling John what he needed to hear, not what he wanted. She had ended the call with a promise that she would be watching, that she loved him, and that they would talk soon.

So now, here he was. Gaz on one side of him, Simon on the other. Price on the other side of Simon. A 'united front' against the onslaught of reporters and gossip journalists alike, like the good little soldiers they were.

To his left, Simon looked calm. His expression was neutral, focused, and almost, if it weren't for the shouting and flashing cameras, *serene*. He was focusing on the water bottle in his hands. Twisting the cap till it was almost off, and then screwing it back down. The action made the tendons on the back of his hand flex, and all Johnny could imagine was those same hands wrapped around his wrists, his thighs, his throat, his-

"Alright you animals. Pipe down" Price announces, " It's the same voice he uses during a half time huddle, when the stakes are high and the future uncertain. This, Johnny remembers, is more high stakes than all of those times. The press, unsurprisingly, are immediately silent.

"We're going to start by making a statement. You will all get a physical copy at the end, so that you can refer to it when you're writing your articles and or gossip rags. We will also be posting a version on the website." As Price is speaking, he glances down at a notebook. Johnny follows his gaze and sees a wall of messy scribbles that covers the page, a mishmash of royal blue ink that looks to have been written so frantically that the page is torn in some places, as if Price had pushed too heavy while he was writing. "If any of you even think of misquoting us, or taking it out of context, you and your organisation will be banned from this press room, our facilities, and any arena in which we are playing in."

The reporters are deathly silent. The only sound in the room is the shuffle of papers as Price pulls out the printed-out version of the statement.

"The Manchester Soldiers are, above anything, a family. By joining this team, you agree to be a part of that family.

"Two days ago, The Manchester Soldiers were made aware of a video involving one of our players in a sexual situation being released on the internet. The person who released the video, who we will not be naming for legal reasons, requested several million pounds in exchange for the only copy of this footage. As the leaders of the Manchester Soldiers, Kate Laswell, Simon Riley, and I denied this demand."

Faintly, Johnny can hear the sounds of pens against paper, journalists furiously scribbling notes. Towards the back row, he can see a pair of journalists, two women, whisper to each other.

Price continues. "This is not the first time a notable footballer has had a sex tape leak. Notable public figures have their private content leaked all the time. However, In the video released two days ago, our captain, Simon Riley, can be seen in a sexual position with another man, which means that the public have responded more fervently than is typical for a sex video. While Most of this response has been positive, some of the public, and the press, have not met the expectations of respect that any of these players deserve

I have had people say that Simon should be removed as Captain. I will not be doing that. I have had people say that he should be benched for the rest of the season. I will not be doing that. I've even, on my way to the facility this morning, had someone tell me that Sion should be removed from the team completely. I can promise you all, right now, that I will not be doing that. The Manchester Soldiers, as an organisation, support our players above all else."

For a moment, Johnny thinks about his old coach. Tries to imagine him sitting in front of the press defending him the way Price is defending Simon. It stings, realising that they never cared about him the way that Price cares about Simon. He also wonders, vaguely, if Price would be willing to do the same for him if he needed to.

Johnny hears a clearing of throat to his left, and turns his head to watch Simon speak. His posture is ramrod straight, his gaze somewhere in the middle distance. "I never intended for the video to be released. I didn't even know it existed until I saw it two days ago." He pauses, and the sharp angle of Simon's jaw tells Johnny he's clenching his teeth as he pauses. "Obviously, this isn't something I wanted released. If I had it my way, this never would have happened.

I would have been happy staying in the closest until I retired. But we can't always get what we want"

There's a weight on his shoulders that Johnny recognises as defeat. He's seen it before, back when they played against each other and Simon projected shot after shot that Johnny had blocked.

"I'm gay." Simon says, and Johnny can see some of that weight lift, just slightly, off of his shoulders

"I didn't get a say in this coming out, but I have suddenly been given a soapbox to stand on, and if you'll allow me, I'd like to take the opportunity to use it" Under his breath, Johnny hears Simon interrupt himself to mutter "Not that you have a choice"

"Homophobia is a disease in football. I've been playing it since I was three years old. The first time I heard the word 'faggot' was on the pitch, had it shouted at me when I was nine years old, from a kid who had heard it from his older brother and had repeated it without knowing what it meant. Homophobia is woven into this sport, and if me being out even changes that slightly, then maybe something good will come out of all of this. Am I expecting things to get better immediately? Of course not. But I'm hoping that the League and the organisations start taking steps to make this league safer for queer players. From the League all the way down to pick up games in the park."

Simon stops speaking, clearly finished saying his piece. For a moment the only sound is that continual stroke of pens against paper.

"Now, are there any questions?" Price asks. Before he's even finished speaking, a sea of hands rises up. Price nods at a redhead in the front row.

"Question for the players. How has this revelation changed the dynamic within the locker room?"

"It hasn't," Gaz replies, instantly. "Simon is still Simon, who he sleeps with isn't any concern to us." Johnny can see the look on Gaz's face, and it's as if he's challenging the people in the room to say something. He reminds Johnny vaguely of a guard dog, or a very brave chihuahua.

Johnny nods in agreement. He wants to add onto it, but his tongue is tied up by the idea of Simon sleeping with anyone. Anyone that isn't him. After a moment, Simon nudges his knee, breaking him out, yet

again, of his spiralling thoughts. "Yeah, what Gaz said. Simon is Simon. The team doesn't exist without him. He's supported me at some of my lowest points, of course we support 'im through this"

In the back of the room, Johnny see's Laswell pinch the bridge of her nose.

"Question for MacTavish." It's a middle-aged man in a suit who speaks next. His shirt is untucked, and his tie is loose. "Are you implying there that Riley being gay is, as you said, a *Low Point*?"

The room is silent. Johnny can hear his pulse, can feel his heart throbbing in his throat.

"I think him being outed without his consent would be a pretty fuckin' low point" Johnny replies. "I wouldn't want to be in his position"

Johnny feels a sharp pain in his shin, and looks to his right, where Gaz is glaring at him. The fucker had just kicked him under the table. John goes to retaliate, but catches Laswell's glare at the last second, the non-verbal scolding clear on her face, even from the other side from the room.

The unkempt journalist, as well as all the others, writes something down in his notebook.

Price seems to be ignoring the scuffle on the other end of the table, focusing instead on the next question, which comes from one of the journalists in the back row, that Johnny had noticed earlier. She has pink hair, a light pastel that may once have been a vibrant pink but has since faded to a pale hue, and the sleeves of her light brown blouse billow nicely at her wrists. "Simon" She begins "What would you say to any other queer player right now, if you could?"

Simon furrows his brow in thought, the lines of his forehead scrunching to meet the bridge of his nose. As he thinks, his face softens. "Loads of things. I'd tell them to hang in there. That there's no shame in being out, but also, they are absolutely not obligated to do so. They don't owe anyone anything except themselves. I'd tell them that who they love doesn't affect the game. I'd tell them I'm proud of them. I'd tell them good luck, unless they're playing against us-" That gets a light chuckle from the crowd in front of them. "I'd tell them that there's more important things than football. After all, it's just a game" Simon shrugs his shoulders.

@TheMoonandtheSt4rs

ManSol Press interview can be summarised as A bunch of straight boys (The owners) going "Pwese don't think we're homophobic" and the press posting "ManSol gay allies!" Who think stinks of rainbow washing tbh

@SiRiwiththeBall

Replying to @TheMoonandtheSt4rs: Are you high?? ManSol is literally owned by a lesbian who is married to a woman?? Stop trying to stir up drama that isn't there.

@TheMoonandtheSt4rs

Replying to @SiRiwiththeBall: Okay but did you see MacTavish's face??? Look me in the eyes and tell me theres nothing going on there

@GunpowderKillerQueen

Does this mean Simon Riley at Manchester Pride bc SIR PLEASE. Imagine the shorts. The harness. The Glitter. Let that man be out and proud.

@ChasetheGrace

Did you guys see John MacTavish's face when price said that the team supports Riley, Like dude atleast pretend to not be homophobic yikes

@HurricaneDrunkinLove

Replying to @ChasetheGrace: I know like fr dude why are you looking so grumpy

@WillowWillowWillow

Slowly making my way through Kate Laswell's wikipedia page and honestly she is such a girlboss and also ☐☐☐ ma'am

@ReggieTheBest

I stopped playing football in high school because of homophobia. Seeing Simon Riley say the words 'I'm gay' makes me regret it. I miss the game.

@ThomaswithaH

Replying to @ReggieTheBest: Hey mate, I saw on your bio you're based in south London. My mates and I have a queer friendly league we play in and we're always looking for more players if you want to join? I'll shoot you a message. We'd love to have you!

—

Johnny

> Be honest, did I fuck up the press thing

Simon

> No

Johnny

> No to being honest or not to the press thing?

Simon

> You didn't mess up the press thing

Johnny

> okay.

> How's Joseph doing?

Simon

> Got into a fight at school.

Johnny

> Oh no! Do you know what over?

Simon

> Beth and Tommy wont tell me

> Which means it's probably over me

Johnny

> That sucks ☐

> Hey, you can add him to the list of people willing to throw down for you

Simon

> My hero, a eight year old in a MacTavish jersey.

Johnny

> an Eight year old and a 26 year old in a MacTavish jersey

Simon

> Johnny i don't need you fighting a child for me

Johnny

> All right.

> Put it on record though, I would fuck up an eight year old if you needed me to.

> Say the word Riley, and I'll start kicking.

Chapter End Notes

Sorry for the delay in getting this out- Work is absoluttely hectic

right now,

I'm still not fully 100% on this chapter, but any changes I've made have only made it worse, so you guys get this *jazz hands*

If you want to follow me on twitter, you can do so [here!](#)

Give and Go

Chapter by [skerryB](#)

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Johnny

> Should I make a statement that im not homophobic? Twitter thinks i am.

Simon had been staring at the message for so long his phone screen had gone dark. Next to him, Tommy let out a cheer, celebrating the save Joseph had made, a beautiful read on the opposing team's striker. Simon looked up just in time to convince Joseph he had seen the save. His face lights up when he sees Simon.

Then, the whistle blows, And Joseph's attention is back on the game. There's something painfully familiar in the determination on his face that has Simon unlocking his phone again, remembering that he still hadn't answered Johnny's message. He'd sent another reply when Simon wasn't looking.

Johnny

> I'm not by the way!

> Homophobic

Simon laughs at that, lets out a huff of air that fogs up in front of his face before dissipating in the morning air. Whoever decided to have the Under 8s play this early had clearly never known the joys of sleeping in under a heavy duvet. The kids seemed to enjoy it though, based on the squeals of laughter he heard from the pitch. Even Joseph, whose eyes are hawk-focused on the ball, seemed unfazed by the chill in the air.

Simon

> Let twitter think whatever it likes. I know you're not.

Johnny

> tbh I wasnt expecting a response this early

> it's a rest day, why the hell are u awake.

Simon lifts his phone to take a photo of Joseph in net, his mohawk slightly askew in a way his mother had called 'windswept' due to all

the running. He checks that there were no other kids in the background, before sending it to Johnny.

Johnny

> !!!!!

> BONNIE LAD!!

> What's the team called?

Simon

> Manchester Bullfinches.

> it's a type of bird

Johnny

> Nice. Jo winning?

Simon looks up to ask Tommy the score, only to see him looking over Simon's shoulder at the phone screen. At his and Johnny's messages.

"This is how you flirt? Disgraceful"

"Piss Off" Simon mutters. If his cheeks were turning red, it was definitely because of the cold.

Tommy only hums in reply before taking a sip from the thermos in his hand. Probably coffee, given the bitter scent Simon could smell from where he stood.

It's two all, by the way" Tommy says. Upon seeing Simon's confused expression, he gestures to the phone. "The Score, since *Johnny* was asking".

Simon texts the score to Johnny, gets a "GO BULLFINCHES!! 💣" In reply, before pocketing the phone. He dragged himself out of bed to watch Joseph play, he may as well watch the game.

"So, are you going to tell him you want to jump his bones, or are you just going to pine forever?"

"We've been over this Tom, I don't-"

"You don't fuck teammates, I know, but this is different Si, he's not-"

"-Don't"

Tommy pauses, just for a moment, before (much to Simon's misery) starting to talk again. "You like Johnny, but more importantly, you trust him. You let him hang out with Joseph, for fucks sake Si. That's

worth something.”

“I don’t fuck teammates”

“You’ve said” Tommy replies “But you not getting laid is starting to harsh my vibe”

“Can we not talk about my sex life at a child’s football game” Simon pleads. He’s certain that the footy mums on the other side of the pitch can hear their conversation, based on the glare they are definitely shooting towards him and Tommy

Tommy takes another sip of his coffee. “Don’t try to change the subject”

The whistle blows, signifying the end of the game. A stampede of children rush to their coaches to devour the stomach-churning combination of orange slices and hot chocolate. Except for Joseph, who takes a moment to touch both of his side posts, a ritual he had learned from a Canadian goalkeeper Simon couldn’t remember the name of. Mark something? With that part of the routine complete, Joseph runs towards the rest of his team as they prepare for the post-game handshake and team huddle.

“Mum wants to meet him”

“Mums already met him” Simon replies, watching Joseph interact with his teammates.

“Mum wants him to come round so she can grill him to see if it's worth you breaking your heart over him” Tommy tilts his head back to drain the last of his coffee, wipes away a small droplet that runs down his chin, catching it before it hits his jacket.

“He’s not breaking my heart.”

“No,” Tommy replies. “You’re doing that all by yourself”. He holds his thermos out for Simon to take, before crouching down just in time to receive Joseph, who is sprinting at them. He leaps into his father’s arms, and looks over at Simon when he is hoisted up.

“DID YOU SEE MY SAVE?!” He yells, paying no mind to the other parents within earshot.

“Sure did, buddy! The way you stopped it with the gloves! Great stuff” Tommy replies.

“Tyler said it was my best game yet, even though I let in two goals”

Tyler was a friend from school, who happened to play for today's opponents. It was good to see that the comradery managed to bleed onto the pitch. “Did he now?” Simon asks. “Did you tell him he played well too?”

In all honesty, Simon had no idea how Tyler had played. Would not be able to pick him from a line up with a gun to his head, much less recount his stats from today's game.

“Yeah! Of course! He got a goal against me, and passed the other to his teammate with the yellow socks to get the other one in”

“Sounds like you were paying too much attention to his socks and not the ball”. Simon replies. Tommy shoots him a glare, warning him to not hyper analyse Joseph's play style like he's one of the Soldiers.

“Maybe, but Johnny says you have to look at the whole player” Joseph replies

“Oh, well if Johnny says it, it must be true” Tommy says, barely able to keep a smirk out of his voice. The mockery in his tone is unnoticed by Joseph, but Simon can read it clearly. When Joseph is distracted, Simon reaches over to flick at Tommy's ear. “Don't be a prick”

“Wouldn't dream of it Si” Tommy replies “Now come on, Granma' said she was making shortbread today.

Tommy cheers and sprints to where the car is parked, leaving Simon and Tommy behind in favour of Victoria Riley's baked goods.

“Just think about it” Tommy says, walking backwards so he can look at Simon whilst still making progress towards the car. “You don't fuck teammates, but at this stage, Johnny's a friend. Am I wrong?”

With that, he spins back around, and continues walking towards the car.

‘Fucking hell’ Simon mutters.

Aside from the paparazzi setting up a camp outside of the facility, practice was fairly normal. He still starts with a warm up, before running laps around the pitch until his calves started to burn in a way

that was familiar and welcome. He still ran practice shots with Johnny, his scoring average against the Scot slowly, but surely, turning more into his favour. He still attended meetings with Price. He still attended tape reviews with the team.

Everything was, as far as Simon could tell, normal.

So, when he returns to the locker room, hair still dripping from the shower, to find Johnny stock still staring at Simon's locker from the other side of the room, Simon takes a moment.

He pauses, takes in Johnny's expression, his body language. His posture is stock still and tense. He's shaking slightly. His jaw is clenched. His brow furrowed. He's angry. Simon notices, angry and in shock.

Then Simon turns, sees what Johnny is staring at, and drops the towel he was using to dry his hair, faintly hearing it plop wetly onto the floor.

Taped to every single surface of his locker is a printed-out screenshot from the video. In full colour, about the size of Simon's palm. Some are taped to the wall, some covering the trinkets he had collected over the years. Hell, whoever had done it even covered the family photo in the corner, taken on Joseph's first Christmas. Whoever had done it had overestimated the amount they would need, given that some had trailed up the wall, nearly touching the ceiling.

"I swear it wasnae me," John says. His voice is haggard

"I know," Simon replies. He digs around in his bag for his phone, using it to snap a quick photo to send to Price.

"It was like it when I got in" Johnny replied "Who would..."

"It doesn't matter," Simon replies. After sending Price the picture, he begins the task of peeling the pictures off of his belongings. After a moment, he feels a presence next to him, sees Johnny's hand reach out to grab at some that Simon had missed.

"It does matter" Johnny replied "Price said that he wouldn't tolerate-"

"Johnny" Simon interrupts. "It doesn't matter"

Johnny goes to speak, but, after realising he has nothing to say, closes his mouth and returns to the task of removing the photos from the

wall above Simon's cubby.

"Why would someone even do this?" Johnny asks. It's unclear to Simon if Johnny is talking to him, or voicing an inner thought. Still, he shrugs in response

"Someone with too much time," he says. He examines the stack in his hand, realising that the top photo is one of the most incriminating, taken when *He* had been mid orgasm, the spurt of cum hitting Simon right on the cheek. The one underneath has some dripping from younger Simon's near silver eyelashes. If he concentrates hard enough, he can still feel the burn of it seeping into his skin.

Simon realises that in his hands there's enough printouts to make one of the worst flip books of all time. A full colour stop motion of one of the worst times of his life.

"What a fucking bastard" Soap mutters. "I'm going to find out who did this and-"

"And do what?" Simon replies "We can't afford to lose any players at the moment Johnny"

"But still" Johnny interjects "You don't deserve this" As he speaks, he looks down at the images in his hands, before shooting his gaze back up to meet Simon's eyes, as if he forgot what was on them and then attempted to immediately divert his gaze once he realised.

"Part of the game" Simon replies. He scrunches up the photographs in his hands and tosses them across the room into a rubbish bin. It hits the rim and deflects in, a shot that has him reminiscing on his practice today with Johnny. "Waste of fucking paper" he mutters.

Johnny makes his own shot, and Simon is impressed to watch it go straight in. "And coloured ink too. Really"

"That's what you're focusing on?" Simon asks

"Anything that stops me focusing on the idea that you think this is acceptable"

"I don't think it's acceptable"

"But you're accepting it!" Johnny replies, the frustration from earlier bubbling out "You say that it's fine, that it's *part of the game*, but that a load of shite Simon"

As he speaks, he gets closer, reaches up to grip Simon by the shoulders, as if he wants to shake him.

Simon looks down at him. *This is exactly why I did this* Simon thinks to himself. *I knew you wouldn't be able to take it.*

A part of Simon's brain, the impulsive and stupid part, wants to pull Johnny into a hug and tell him that everything will be fine. Instead, he tosses that part of his brain in the bin alongside the photos, and reaches up to pull Johnny's hands off of his shoulders. "Thanks for helping to get rid of them," he says. "I appreciate it. Now, can we not speak about it ever again"

Johnny wants to say more, Simon can tell, but he (mercifully) stops himself, and simply nods instead. Simon can see that his eyes are wide, and slightly wet, the kind of wetness that has Simon thinking of the Scottish lochs that are just as deep, and full of the unknown mysteries, as the man in front of him.

"Thank you," Simon says. With that done, he turns, and hoists his bag over one shoulder. "Do you need a ride home?"

Johnny nods. He'd taken an uber halfway to the facility, and had jogged the rest of the way, going through a maintenance door to avoid the press that were staking out the front entrance.

"Okay, let's go," He starts walking to his car, knowing that Johnny will be close behind him, he doesn't turn around, lest Johnny pulls a Eurydice and disappears from his life forever. Once they reach the car, Johnny clears his voice and speaks again.

"Your brother texted me, by the way."

Simon pauses, staring at Johnny over the roof of his car. "What did he say"

"He asked what a good brand of scotch is"

Simon squints at Johnny. "What else did he say?"

"What did you say?"

"I asked him how he got my number"

"I didn't give it to him"

"Ay, I know" Johnny responds "He took it from your contacts while

you were busy playing football with Joseph, sent me a picture to prove it and everything”

“Right,” Simon replies. “A picture of what?”

“A picture of you an’ Joseph” Johnny replies. He pulls his phone out of the pocket of the jacket, and after a few second thumbing at his screen, turns it to face Simon

It’s a picture of him all right. Slightly blurred, as if taken in a hurry. He’s holding Joseph by the torso, legs and head sticking out horizontally. It’s in his mother’s back yard, where the two flower pots have been arranged to form goalposts are a permanent feature. Joseph seems to be laughing, or squealing in Joy. even the Simon on the screen was happy, grinning down at Joseph, oblivious to the camera.

“I said that I couldn’t come until after the season” Johnny says, capturing Simon’s attention once again.

Simon opens the door to the car, and waits until Johnny is inside before he speaks.

“Couldn’t what?”

“Come round for dinner. He said that was bollocks though since you do family dinner every Sunday that you can”

Part of Simon feels that he should be embarrassed about Johnny knowing that detail about him “I do.” Simon replies, filling with a sense of relief about the world not caving in upon the confession.

“I...” Johnny goes to speak, then shuts himself up. “It sounds nice. I wouldn’t wan’ to intrude”

“You wouldn’t be intruding” Simon replies. If it’s too quick, Johnny doesn’t seem to notice. “I’d love for you to come.”

Johnny seems to light up at that, and Simon does his hardest to ignore the same warmth in his chest.

“If you’re sure. I’d love to taste Victoria Riley’s cooking, Joseph said good things about it last time I spoke to him”

Simon swallows the lump filling his throat. His mother’s cooking had always been able to fill a void in his heart, leaving him with a warmth that he was slowly used to getting from another, more recent source.

“It will have to be next week; we’ve got an away game this week. Don’t get back until Monday mid-day”

“S’ okay” Johnny replies “I’m sure it’ll be worth the wait.”

Chapter End Notes

If you want, you can follow me on twitter [here!](#)
, and listen to me rant about this fic and my job and whatever
else I post about

Breakaway

Chapter by [skerryB](#)

Chapter Notes

Could this have been two chapters? Yes

Could I be arsed separating them? Absolutely not.

C/w- Mentions of Alcohol consumption

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Tommy, John had decided, was fucking hilarious. Once he got over the “This is a stranger texting me pretending to be Simon’s brother” road bump, and on to the “Oh, you’re actually Simon’s brother” highway, he’d shown himself to be genuinely funny, in a less reserved way that Johnny had come to expect from Simon.

It also helped that he sent photos of Joseph, grinning holding up various drawings or awards he had received at school.

He had also, completely unprompted, sent photos of Simon from their childhood. Pictures of a round faced blond boy whose smile shrunk as he had aged. A teenager, wearing a teal football jersey and towering over his teammates. He’d even been sent Simon’s school leavers prom photo, an awkward photo of Simon, in an oversized suit jacket and too short pants, standing next to a girl with pink hair that Tommy had been very insistent was ‘just a friend’.

Simon hates it. Johnny doesn't need to be an expert on Simon Riley to read the tension in his shoulders when he sees John on his phone, when he mentions something Tommy said, shows him a meme that Tommy sent him. It's subtle, but it's there, and that fact alone is enough for Johnny to notice it.

Even now, on the bus to their away game down in Southampton, Johnny could sense the side eye Simon was giving him, as if he wanted to see what was on Johnny's phone, but also scared of what he would find.

It made him feel weirdly powerful, having this amount of control over Simon and his mood. Powerful, but also deeply uncomfortable.

“I’m just on twitter” Johnny mutters. He’s unsure if he’s been heard,

given the loud noise of the bus that surrounds them.

Simon hums in response, looking up from the novel he had been reading. It was a battered copy of a paperback, a lot of the pages dog-eared with sections underlined. Johnny would have called it 'well loved'. There were even annotations on the margins of the page, but the delicate, looping letters didn't seem to match Simon's strong hands. He'd have to ask about it later.

"How are you feeling about Southampton?" Simon asks.

"Pretty good, their defence has been playin' like shite lately, so they'll be focusing on that today."

"Which sucks for me and Gaz" Simon cuts in

"You're a big boy, you'll manage" Johnny replies "But if they're focusing their defence, their forwards will be sloppy"

Simon considers that, tilts his head and furrows his brow in a sign Johnny has learnt means he's thinking about football, running imaginary drills in his head.

"We'll see"

Simon didn't sound convinced, as if the drills he had run in his head didn't end up in his favour.

"I'll tell you what, we'll make a bet" Soap offers. "Since I know for a fact that we will win"

"It's against the rules for us to bet" Simon says dryly.

"Not like that, a bet between us"

"Still think that's against the rules"

"You're a sour puss" Johnny replies.

Simon closes the book in his lap with a soft thud, before reaching to pull his bag from under his seat. "Alright. What's the pot?" He unzips his bag, and places the book inside with a gentleness that is surprising to Johnny.

Johnny smirks. "If I win, you have to come out on the town with me, a good ol' fashioned Southampton pub crawl"

Simon nods. "It won't happen, but alright. If I win, I get a quiet night in, and stop messaging Tommy"

"You're on. It's not going to happen though. Their forwards will play like shit though"

Simon hums in response. "Well see"

—

The first half, Simon was hopeful. Johnny had been right, they were focusing their defence, and their forwards had been sloppy. Johnny had been an impenetrable wall for the first forty-five, a blur of movement that had the home crowd booing.

It also hadn't helped that the crowd was especially vocal whenever Simon had possession. The cheers instantly turning sour. In the last half, the jeers had turned from general negative booing to an impressively coordinated chant of "Get On your knees!"

Right. He'd almost forgotten about the video. Almost.

The crowd had been relentless, and Simon did his best to shake it off, tune them out until it became a mindless drone. He focused on other things, Price yelling, the sounds of his boots hitting the dense grass, The burning inhale and exhale of his lungs in his chest. He could do this. He had to.

Across the pitch, the same could not be said for Johnny. Simon could see it in his step. His saves had been good, but not great. Something about his play style was gone. The wicked, once insufferable confidence was no longer there, and it was affecting his Game.

In the end, it was a draw.

After the final whistle, Southampton's captain, a tall redhead named Daniel or something, approached him. He'd stuck his hand out for a handshake, and had offered Simon a weak grimace.

"Sorry about the crowd, I was hopin' they'd be better but-"

"You can't control them, shouldn't have to" Simon responds. "I get it"

"Still-" Captain Southampton says "Doesn't mean you should put up with it"

His words had Simon thinking of Johnny. Thinking of his anger in the

locker room a few days ago.

Simon drops his hand and shrugs. He goes to turn to his team, but pauses at the sound of approaching footsteps.

Johnny stops in front of him. The confidence is back, or at least some illusion of it. His gloves are off, tucked into the waistband of his shorts. Simon vaguely remembers Johnny complaining about how sweaty his hands got while playing, and how eager he was to take them off as soon as possible.

He leans in close, as if he's about to share a secret with Simon. "So, our bet?"

Right, their wager. "We never discussed a draw"

"We'll make a compromise" John says. "You get a drink with me, and I don't text Tommy for three days"

Simon looks around the stadium, at the crowd slowly leaking out of the seats and into the evening. They probably had plans of their own. Drinks with friends, dinner with loved ones.

"Maybe not the best idea to hit up a Southampton pub after today's game" Simon mutters.

"Alright, how about you come to my room? I'll even get you some nice Bourbon."

Simon considers it. On one hand, it's better than sitting in his room alone, staring up at the ceiling until sleep took him.

"Alright." Simon agrees. The idea of a pub crawl so soon after this game, of being in the same room as one of the thousands of people that had jeered at him, made his stomach churn. Spending the evening in Johnny's room sipping Bourbon, on the other hand, sounded like heaven.

—

Before he could reach that heaven though, he had to go through the post-game press. In the eyes of the press, a tie was the most boring outcome, so Simon was hopeful that today's press room would be near empty, the hometown reporters choosing instead to interview Southampton about their lacklustre defensive line.

So when he walks in, and sees a mosh pit of reporters, he can't help

but be a little bit disappointed.

He really hopes Johnny was serious about the good bourbon.

He sits, shifts in his seat, crosses his legs at the ankles, and pulls the microphone close to him. "Alright. Who's first?"

These reporters, it seems, are at least decent enough to wait to be called on. Their hands go up, but no one speaks. Simon points to a woman in a yellow and brown pantsuit. "Amanda Breazel, *Southern Independent*. Simon, today you all started strong but lost it in the second there. What changed?"

Simon thinks for a moment. "Hard to say. A lot of things. Their forwards stepped up after the half."

The reporter hums, clearly not satisfied with his response. For a second, she looks like she's going to follow up with a second question, and Simon quickly points to another reporter.

"Seth Green, *The Sun*. After the game it looked like David Mason had some words with you. Can you elaborate on what he said to you?"

Right. David, that's what the captain's name was. "I don't think I'm at liberty to say" Simon responds. "We discussed the current climate. He said he'd hoped that the weather would have been better. I said it was about as good as I expected"

"You mean to tell me that David Mason approached you after a tie game to discuss the weather?". Hearing it back, it did sound a little odd.

Simon leans in closer, hunches lower so that his mouth is closer to the microphone. "Yes," he says.

He gestures to another reporter.

"Simon, It's now been a week since you were outed. How have you found the response to that so far?"

He thinks of the photos in his locker room. Of the jeers from today's crowd. He thinks about Joseph coming home with bruised knuckles after a schoolyard scrap. He thinks about Johnny, shaking with rage with the photos, of his frustration at Simon's front of nonchalance.

"To be honest, it's been up and down." Simon pauses, lets his mouth catch up with his brain, lest he says something Laswell can ream him

for later. “Mostly, it’s been good. The press has been surprisingly respectful. The team has been great. Overall, the response has been resoundingly positive.”

“So you don’t regret being outed?”

Movement in the back of the room catches his attention. It’s Johnny, in casual street clothes, holding up a brown paper bag and waving it at Simon. Looks like he’d made good on his promise.

“I’m sorry, can you repeat the question?” Simon asks

“Do you regret being outed?” The reporter asks again.

Simon glances up at Johnny, offers him a small smile before turning his attention back to the reporters. “No. No I don’t”

—

Johnny was quickly realising that bourbon, or at least the bourbon that Simon liked, was a lot fruitier than his normal Scotch. He’d picked a bottle based on what he remembered seeing in Simon’s liquor cabinet all those weeks ago. The bottle was small, and the front had a motif of four roses in a bunch embossed on it.

Simon seemed to enjoy it though, based on the light flush on his cheeks. The dusty pink that spread across his cheekbones and kissed his ears. He looked, very vaguely, like a painting of a young Queen Victoria, the pale tones of her skin and the hue of her rosy cheeks a near perfect match to Simon’s own.

He was a masterpiece, one that Johnny could spend hours admiring.

It didn’t help that the light from the bedside table cast the panes of his face in a warm glow, almost angelic and illuminated. He could see, now, why artists spent years on a single portrait. He would gladly spend the same time, or even longer, trying to capture the beauty of the angel before him. He’d already filled most of his latest travel sketchbook with rushed drawings of Simon, quick thumbnail illustrations he’d done in the middle of the night, when his thoughts were too wild to let him sleep. Would probably fill a few more pages by morning, in an attempt to keep the image in front of him for just a little longer.

For now though, his sketchbook was tucked securely in his luggage, and instead of a pencil in his hand, he had a bottle of what had turned

out to be one of Simon's favourites.

Currently, they were both sat on the end of Johnny's bed. He hadn't been able to find any glasses in his room, and when he'd offered to call room service to get some, Simon had shaken his head and cracked open the bottle, offering it to Johnny.

The first thing that had hit him was the smell of Apple, and Vanilla. Overall, the drink was refreshing, made even more sweeter when Simon had beamed at Johnny's hum of approval. Their fingers had brushed when Johnny had handed the bottle back to Simon, and if Johnny had paused just a millisecond longer than necessary to savour Simon's touch, that was between him and him alone.

"So how was the press?" Johnny asks, eager to get Simon talking.

"They were fine. Same old same old" Simon answers. He takes a swig from the bottle, tilting his head back. The long expanse of throat that it exposes is enough to send Johnny spiralling.

"How come I don't have to do as much press as you?"

Simon swallows, handing the bottle back to Johnny. "It's because I'm captain, and I get paid more to do it."

"What if I wanted to do more press?" Johnny asks

"You'd be crazy" Simon replies. "Do you?"

"Well," Johnny pauses. "Not really, but I would if it meant you had to do it less"

Simon shakes his head. "I literally get paid to do it"

"I feel like you put up with a lot more than what you should for no reason" Johnny says. He takes a sip of the bourbon. He closes his eyes to savour the taste. When he opens them, Simon is looking at him, confused.

"What do you mean?"

"You just... I don't know... You always seem to take the short straw. You do press when no one else wants to. You bunked with me that one time when no one else wanted to. You put up with all the homophobia from the public, you-"

"I do what I have to" Simon replies. "Besides, I didn't *have* to bunk

with you that one time, I requested it.”

The confession hits Johnny like a football straight to the chest. “What do you mean you requested it?”

“I asked Price to put us together. I wanted to get to know you”

“And? Did you get to know me?”

Simon looks at Johnny, tilts his head at the question. After a moment, he offers Johnny a weak smile.

“I did.”

“After one night? that seems unlikely” Johnny teases

Simon laughs at that, and God, the sound is richer than the whiskey shared between them. “You woke me up when I had a nightmare and went on a run with me in the middle of the night. That told me everything I needed to know” Simon replies. He shifts closer to Johnny, and holds his hand out for the bottle, taking it when Johnny hands it over. “You ask me about my nephew, about my mum. You talk to me about art, Hell Johnny, you exchange memes with my brother”

Simon pushes the lid back onto the bourbon, and places it next to him. “You were the most arrogant people I’d ever met, but then I realised that you had every right to be, because underneath that is one of the best men I’ve ever met.” Simon places a hand on Johnny’s shoulder. He squeezes it lightly. “A while ago, I said that you made me a better player, and I meant that, But the truth of it all Johnny is that you make me want to be a better person. So yeah, I think I did get to know you.”

Johnny can feel himself flush, knowing that he isn’t drunk enough to blame it on the alcohol. Knows he won’t be able to blame it for his next actions.

Johnny surges forwards, bumping his mouth into Simon’s. After the initial shock, Simon’s mouth opens, and Johnny pushes deeper, chasing the taste of the bourbon, the notes of Rye, Oak and fruit that had soothed his throat earlier. He also gets something else, something distinctly *Simon* that he hunts until he feels his lungs burn.

Simon’s hands come up to cup Johnny’s jaw, and the warmth from his palm seeping into Johnny’s cheek has him letting out a low whine. He

hasn't had this before, this rolling warmth of a kiss that to him, is more than the burn of passionate lust he has come to expect from his one-night stands and forgotten named hookups.

And after a moment, Simon pulls away, taking that comforting warmth with him. Johnny goes to chase it, but is held back by the hands on his cheeks.

Simon looks gorgeous like this. The dusty pink flush from earlier a more vibrant red. His lips were spit shined and his pupils blown wide. "Johnny... I"

Johnny silences him with another kiss, reaches out and pulls Simon closer to him. It's short this time, a quick touch of lips against his before Johnny pulls away.

"I'm gay" Johnny says.

"I know" Simon replies. He traces over John's cheek with his thumb, and Soap leans into the touch. "We... We shouldn't do this"

"Probably not," Johnny replies. "Come on Si, you always take the short straw, be selfish for once." As he speaks, Johnny leans in, tracing his lips against Simon's neck, against that tantalising line of throat he'd been eyeing off earlier.

In an instant, Johnny is moving, thrown off balance as Simon pulls him closer, manhandles Johnny so he's straddling Simon's lap. In this position, Johnny is slightly taller, and has to look down to meet Simon's gaze. Simon looks up at him, grinning. He rises upwards, traces along Johnny's jaw with his teeth. "I've been thinking about this ever since you showed up to the game with those hickeys" Simon confesses. "Of having you like this"

"Well, now you've got me" Johnny says, smirking down at him. "Now what?"

Simon leans backwards, falling onto the mattress and pulling Johnny with him.

—

When Simon wakes in the morning, it's to an unfamiliar weight on his chest, and something soft brushing against his nose. He shifts, only for the body next to him to let out a whine and tighten their grip. His grip.

Oh.

A flood of memories comes back to him at once. Sharing the Four Roses Whiskey. Talking. Johnny's lips against this. Johnny essentially in his lap. Johnny, trailing kisses down Simon's throat. Simon doing the same. Simon *finally* getting his hands on Johnny's mohawk, softer than he expected it to be, the shaved sides prickly under his touch. Johnny pulling him in for kiss after kiss after kiss until they had grown tired of that and moved to embracing each other instead.

Johnny shifts slightly, and the scratch of his facial hair against Simon's chest has him letting out a quiet hiss in pain.

"Ye awake?" Johnny asks. His voice is rough with sleep, the accent thick like the fog outside their hotel window. Simon hums in response.

"We didn't fuck, did we?" Simon shakes his head. He goes to sit up, and Johnny shifts so he's able to do so.

"Shame" Johnny says. The tone of his voice implies that he's genuinely upset about that. "Maybe another time". His voice is soft, and Simon can sense a timidity that is so uncharacteristically Johnny, so ill fitting, that his instinct is to immediately dispel it.

"I don't have sex in hotels" Simon says. "Its..." he pauses, hit by a tsunami of him in a hotel room, in a series of hotel rooms, on his knees, on his back, on his stomach, bent over the bed. Of Simon looking up and seeing *him* leer down at him with an expression Simon can't believe he'd once thought had been love.

"You don't need to explain yourself," Johnny says, bringing Simon back to the present. "Not to me, okay?" He places a hand on Simon's cheek, which works to ground Simon.

Simon nods in response. "One day, I'll tell you everything," Simon says. It's a promise, one that he's doubting he'll regret.

"And I'll do the same," Johnny replies. He presses a kiss to the side of Simon's temple, the part that scrunches the most when he can see Simon thinking. "Now come on, we've got twenty minutes to be downstairs, and it'll be suspicious if we both arrive at the same time with love bites"

Simon is downstairs five minutes later. Johnny had been considerate enough to hide most of his marks below where the collar of his compression shirt sat, just below his Adam's apple. Simon would have

to thank Johnny for that later.

He feels slightly guilty for the absolute mess that he'd left on Johnny's neck, some of the marks already turning purple by the time Simon had pulled on his shirt and walked out of Johnny's room.

The scarf was a nice touch, the blue brought out Johnny's eyes nicely, and it was cold enough that none of the team suspected anything as Johnny climbed onto the bus, and took his usual spot in the seat next to Simon. He was on his phone, and after a brief pause, Simon pulls out his own and sends off a text

Simon

> You want to come back to mine after this?

Simon looks up at Johnny, and meets his eyes. There's something there, something bright, something warm. It's not until he nods in reply that Simon realises what it was

It's hope.

Chapter End Notes

Follow me on twitter [here!](#)

Home Play

Chapter by [skerryB](#)

Chapter Notes

GUYS WE HAVE FAN ART!!

the AMAZING @Cleofied_Lance on twitter [made fanart](#) of the locker scene a few chapters ago. I love it so much, i literally printed it out and put it on my desk.

Thank you CAL!!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Simon had always known that Johnny was handsome. It didn't surprise him that he looked good shirtless. They were both professional athletes, it came with the territory.

What he had not expected, however, was how utterly *breathhtaking* Johnny looked the next morning.

He'd woken up alone, but the bed had still been warm. Then he'd heard a clatter, and the slow boil of his kettle downstairs. Obviously, he had to investigate.

Johnny reaches up to grab a mug from the top shelf, and the hem of Simon's hoodie rises, revealing small fingerprint bruises on Johnny's hips. If he wanted to, Simon could reach out and match them up perfectly with his own fingers.

Then Johnny turns, has his back to Simon. His arse is perfect, round and soft and catching the light perfectly, and then Simon's eyes trail upwards, and Simon's brain completely shuts down.

Stretched across Johnny's shoulder blades in bold font, is 'RILEY'. Underneath, the '04' takes up most of the real estate on Johnny's upper back. Simon felt as if he had no air left in his lungs

He was completely breathtaking.

"You look gorgeous" Simon says, once he's able to connect a thought to his mouth and lift his jaw from the floor.

"Good morning to you too," Johnny says. He turns, and in his hands

are two steaming mugs, He holds one, a pale blue one with a slight chip in the handle, out to Simon.

Simon takes it, savouring the brush of his hand against Johnny's. His hand was warm, a side effect of the tea, most likely. He takes a sip. It's sweet, and brewed to perfection. He looks up at Johnny with confusion.

"How did you know?"

"I googled it," Johnny confesses. "You mentioned it in a GQ article like years ago, Did I get it right?" There's that same optimism from last night, that Hope.

"It's perfect" He answers. It truly is. The earl grey brewed to perfection, the half spoon of honey sweetening it without taking away the floral notes of the tea. "You could have asked me though, rather than googling it"

Johnny shrugs. "You were asleep." He takes a sip of his own mug. Coffee, probably from the instant that he bought for when Beth and Tommy come round. Johnny leans up against the kitchen island. At this closeness, he has to tilt his head back to look up at Simon. "Thanks for the jumper, by the way"

"It suits you" Simon replies. He grips one of the hood's drawstrings in his hand and wraps it around his pointer finger, the subtle movement drawing him closer to Johnny.

"Is this the part where you say it would look even better on your bedroom floor?" Johnny asks, and that same devious smirk is back. It lights up his face, the way Johnny is grinning up at him like the devil. For a moment, he thinks about how he used to hate this expression, and the man wearing it. It feels like a lifetime ago.

"Normally, yes" Simon replies. He leans down slightly to kiss Johnny, humming in appreciation when he feels Johnny stand on tip toes to meet him the rest of the way. "But we have practice, and you have none of your kit here, so you'll have to go home to get it." The words are quiet, uttered while his lips are still brushing against Johnny's. He can feel the huff of resignation that Johnny lets out. He pulls away, and sees that Johnny is honest to God *pouting* at him.

Fifteen minutes later, they're standing In Simon's threshold. Johnny had to leave soon, and Simon knew that, but he had decided to follow Johnny's advice and be selfish, and right now, that means kissing him

at the door. He tasted like Simon's toothpaste, the taste of mint overpowering the coffee from earlier. Eventually, Simon pulls away

"I'll see you at practice, alright?"

Johnny kisses him once more. The scarf is back, the blue and white one that Simon has now realised resembles the Scottish flag. Underneath it was a smattering of love bites Simon was, for once, proud to see on Johnny's skin.

"Practice" Johnny confirms. He steps away, goes to open the door. "So, we don't do this in front of the team?" Simon shakes his head in response. He still wasn't entirely sure what *this* was, aside from a bad idea that would doom them both in the long run, best to avoid getting the rest of the team involved until then.

Something flicked across Johnny's face, so quickly Simon might have imagined it. It looked vaguely like grief, or sadness. In a whisp, it was gone, replaced by Johnny's standard jovial expression.

"Alright Captain. I'll see you then" and with that, Johnny is gone.

And Simon is left alone in the entryway to the house. He had ten minutes before he would normally leave, and thought that a good way to use that time would be to check his emails. He made his way upstairs to retrieve his phone from where it was still sitting on the nightstand.

—

MR DO NOT ANSWER

> Sweetheart if you wanted my attention you didn't need to leak the video

> You just needed to answer my calls

> cmon Si, I know you still think about me

—

MANCHESTER SOLDIERS A SOLID REGIMENT IN PRACTICE

By Samuel Barten

I had the privilege of sitting in on a Manchester Soldiers practice, and observing their training session

It was a typical dreary Tuesday when I arrived at the Manchester Soldier's facilities, a building lovingly referred to as 'The Barracks' by local fans. I,

alongside a few other reporters, had been invited by the club's owner, Kate Laswell, to observe the day's training session. We were greeted at the Door by Laswell herself, with her navy suit and warm smile.

The facility is near empty when we arrive. Laswell wanted to give us a tour before the players arrived.

Well, the rest of the players. By the time we had arrived, a couple were mingling. John MacTavish was cleaning his boots. He greeted us with a standard charm we've come to expect.

I could write an entire novel on what I saw that day, instead, I'll summarise it for you in three simple observations.

1) John Price is a good Coach

You ask any analyst, they'll say Price is one of the best, but when you ask them to explain why? They trip and stumble. He just has the "Right stuff". When you ask further, they aren't able to define that. Some call it "Game Smarts, others "The passion for the sport"

For me, I think it's a deep-rooted paternal instinct.

His desk is littered with photos of 'his boys'. Official team photos, selfies taken on nights out, even a photo of the team in someone's living room, all wearing matching Christmas hats. Hell, several players (who wish to remain anonymous) have him listed as 'Dad' in their contacts. One even told me that his children call him "Uncle Price".

In a press conference a few weeks ago (if you're reading this, you know the one" Price said "The Manchester Soldiers are, above anything, a family" And if that's the case, Price is definitely the father, with this rag tag assortment of players being his rambunctious sons.

2) The team meshes, like, freakishly well

Seriously. The team can read each other's minds. They ran a drill where they split into partners and one player had to kick it to the other, but they couldn't look at each other, and most of the partners did really well. Alejandro Vargas and Rodolfo Parra, who I'm told have been playing together since they were children, had EVERY SINGLE PASS connect. That's beyond a coincidence, or luck, that's Beyond Skill. The idea that these two players are so in sync that they can communicate without words, or without even looking at each other? Unheard of.

And the best part? They weren't the only successful pairing. It honestly felt

more like the team was showing off for us, but Price had promised me (honest to God took his hat off and placed it over his heart) that the team had never tried that before, and even he was surprised by the success.

3) Simon Riley is just built different.

Seriously, we got there before the players, hell, even coach Price was yet to arrive. Despite this though, Simon Riley was there, Training gear on, running laps. He didn't even have headphones on, or anything. Just him, the grass underneath him, and the in and out of his breath. It's insane. I asked him if he normally listened to music, a podcast, or anything while he ran. And his response? "Sometimes I take phone calls, but other than that, no". What kind of freak does that?

After the week or so that Simon Riely has had, you'd be more than forgiving to let the dude take a break. But not, here he is, running laps as a warm up, working hard. Why? I think it ties back to Price? Price (and by default, the organisation) supports Simon Riley. Simon Riley does his best to support the team. The cycle continues.

Overall, Manchester Soldiers are in a good spot right now. Is it perfect? No. Will it ever be? Probably not. But fans should be well assured that the team is in the position to do great things.

For more updates, and All things football, follow me on twitter at @SamOnThePitch.

John

> Hey Tommy. Dinner tonight, I'm thinking of bringing your mum a bottle of wine, do you know what she likes?

Tommy

> Don't. Mum doesn't drink.

> You don't need to bring something.

John

> My ma would have my ass if I showed up at someones house without a gift

> Chocolates?

Tommy

> Fuckin I don't know man

John

> well what do you give her?

Tommy

> Best thing about having a kid, I give her one of Jo's shitty family drawings he did for school and she's saying it's the best present ever.

> Get her some flowers idk man

John

> Okay. Thanks

Tommy

No problem G.

—

@Cleofied_Lance

Guys I MET JOHN MACTAVISH TODAY IM SCREAMING!!!!

@StephanienotStefany

Replying to @Cleofied_Lance: OMG WHAT!! SO JEALOUS

@Cleofied_Lance

Replying to StephanieNotStefany: Yeah omg so he came into work (I work at a florist) right before closing and I was like UGGGGH and then I realised it was him. He was super nice and asked what flowers are good? 1/2

@Cleofied_Lance

And in my head im like 'dude are you fr this is a florist theyre all good" but I'm a great employee so I was like "Well what's the occasion?" And he goes "Uhhhh, Dinner." And was super NERVOUS? Anyway we ended up going with some marigolds. 2/2

—

Tommy was sat in the living room, watching his older brother pace from one side of the living room to the other. Occasionally he would stop and fix a crocked picture frame, or wipe down a surface that their mum had definitely dusted earlier.

"I don't think I've ever seen you this nervous before Si" he says.

"Piss off" comes Simon's reply. He didn't even look towards Tommy, but if he did, he knew he'd see the cheeky grin his brother loved to wear so much.

"It's just John, it's just dinner, you'll be fine. Just let Joseph do most of

the talking"

Joseph, who was currently in the back yard with his grandmother, collecting some last-minute herbs for tonight's meal, had been a ball of excitement all day in the lead up, once Johnny had confirmed that Yes, he would like to come to dinner, and Yes, he was so excited to taste Joseph's cooking.

"It's not that" Simon replies. "It's... something else"

"Sure," Tommy replies. It's clear in his tone that he doesn't believe Simon. "What is it then?"

In the distance, they hear a car door shut, and Simon feels his phone buzz in his pocket.

"I'll tell you later" Simon says. He spares one last glance across the room before moving to open the front door. He only hopes Tommy recognises the "Please. Don't bring it up right now" in his tone.

Seeing Johnny at the door, carrying a bright bunch of golden yellow flowers was enough to have Simon forgetting his stress. He was stunning, and his smile when the door opened was more vibrant than the fresh blooms in his hands.

'That smile is for you' said a thought, in the back of his mind.

They'd discussed how they wanted to handle this night, if they wanted to tell Simon's family about their budding 'relationship', or if they had wanted to have this simply be 'Simon bringing a teammate around for dinner'

They'd chosen the teammate route; a decision Simon was instantly regretting. "Those for me?" He asks, quiet enough that Tommy wouldn't hear them from the next room, nodding at the flowers

"Depends, are you Mrs Riley?" John says in reply. He slides past Simon, barely brushing his free hand on Simon's arm.

The Rileys, Johnny was quick to realise, had a routine for these dinners.

Beth and Tom would set the table. Mrs Riley "no please, call me Victoria" and Joseph would serve dinner. Tonight, it was a chicken-

based dish with a red sauce that Joseph, who was next to him at the table, was telling him about.

"The tomatoes come from G'mas garden" he says, beaming in pride. "We planted them when they were seeds and now they're big plants? Isn't that so cool?"

Johnny nods in response, unable to talk with the food in his mouth. It was really good, a nice blend of herbs and a touch of spice that enhanced the entire dish.

"-and we have pet worms that we feed and they poo and their poo helps the plants grow even better. We learned about it at school."

Johnny was glad he was used to the high pace of a match, as it made it easier for him to keep up with Joseph's constant barrage of information.

"Science is my favourite subject at school, aside from when we do sport, but that's an obvious one, what was your favourite subject, Johnny?"

"Probably art" Johnny replies, he looks up at Simon, who is just grinning at him.

"Why?"

"I dunno mate, I just liked to draw things" His answer is weak, but it seems to satisfy the youngest Riley, who returns his attention to his vegetables.

"So how are you finding Manchester so far?" Victoria asks. She's a beautiful woman, with an angular jaw and the same caramelised honey brown eyes Johnny would recognise anywhere.

"The city? It's been good, I haven't had a chance to see too much of it, with work and all"

Victoria nods. "Have you been to the Mag yet? It's no Tate, but there's some wonderful pieces"

Johnny shakes his head. "It's on the list, but probably not until the mid-season break"

"It's good to see you have some knowledge of culture" Victoria replies, "makes for a well-rounded individual"

“Thank you” Johnny replies. He’s not entirely sure if it’s a compliment or not. “Dinner is great, by the way. Thank you for having me”

“Thank you for coming, and for the flowers. Marigolds are one of my favourites”. Victoria wasn’t able to find a vase for them, so instead they hand ended up in separate containers in the kitchen, a few in glass jars, in rinsed out tin cans, and a coke bottle that Tommy had put in the recycling box earlier.

Johnny smiles in response. He looks down at his plate, debating whether or not to risk Victoria’s impression of him being a ‘well rounded individual’ by licking the remaining sauce off of his plate. Instead, he ignores that urge, and takes in his surroundings

The room was small, but in a way that Johnny would call cozy, and a real estate agent would call *intimate* . The wallpaper was a pale yellow, and had a border of delicate white flowers near the ceiling. A majority of the wall was covered in a gallery of various frames. Family pictures, drawings, even a few newspaper clippings. Some of Joseph in his school uniform, sitting in front of a blue background. It didn’t go unnoticed to John that Simon’s father was absent. Some of the photos, the older ones, appeared to have had him physically cut out, or were torn awkwardly to remove him from the composition.

One of the largest images was a family portrait. Simon and Tommy in suits, with light yellow flowers pinned to their lapels. Beth in a white dress, holding a bouquet of marigolds. Next to her, Victoria, in a navy-blue dress and holding a young Joseph, around four or five, in her arms. Behind them was an old-fashioned looking library, a wall of books lining the shelves.

Johnny allows himself to fantasise for a moment. What would his and Simon’s wedding look like? He couldn’t imagine Simon wanting to get married in a church, but would he want to get married somewhere close to home, or would he be willing to travel to Scotland? Would he wear a kilt, like all the good MacTavish men before him?

Johnny’s train of thought is interrupted by a tugging at his elbow, and he looks down at Joseph. “Do you want to play outside with me?” As he speaks, he looks up at Johnny with eyes the size of dinner plates, and Johnny can’t help but nod.

Simon is elbows deep in the kitchen sink when his mother approaches him from behind. From here, if he looks up, he can see the backyard,

where Joseph and Johnny are practicing their juggling. So far Johnny has gotten up to sixteen as his highest, with Johnny occasionally stopping him to correct his positioning.

"I like him" his mother says. She doesn't make eye contact with Simon as she picks up a tea towel and dries the plates Simon had already washed. This was a part of their routine. Simon washing, her drying, the whole time the two of them talking. "He's...nice"

"Say what you want to say mum" Simon says. It's a phrase from when they had gone to family therapy, explicit instruction for someone in their family to speak their mind, much needed after so long living in a house filled with fear.

"You love him" she says, as if discussing the weather, or the sum of one plus one being two.

Simon can't even bring himself to deny it. "I do"

Out of the corner of his eye, she nods. Once, firmly, her lips pressed in a thin line.

"I thought you said you don't mess around with teammates"

"He's different" Simon replies

"For your sake, I hope he is"

"Ma, you said you liked him, where is this coming from?"

"Does he know that you love him?" she asks. "I see the way you look at him Simon, you look like you would give him the world. I know that look Simon. That scares the shit out of me."

Simon pauses. He hasn't said it outright. Surely Johnny would know, or at least have some idea that this was something more than a casual fuck for him. "We haven't... talked about it"

She nods again. And Simon can tell that she wants to say more. Simon sighs. "Go on."

"I just don't want this to be another Manny-"

Simon shoves the cutlery he's washing into the sink with a loud clatter. His mother flinches at the loud noise. "Don't. Don't talk about him"

“Simon”

“Mum.”

Her face softens. She reaches out, cups one of his fists in her hands, steadying it. When it had started shaking, he didn't know. The gesture reminded him of when he was a child, and she would come home to find his knuckles bloody after trying to defend Tommy “You're right. I'm sorry. You asked us not to bring it up again, and I broke that promise. I'm sorry”

Simon wipes his hands on his jeans, feeling the water instantly seep into his thighs, before pulling her into a hug. One that she instantly reciprocates. Despite being a solid foot taller than her, he felt small at this moment.

“We've slept together” Simon confesses, the sound muffled by his mother's hair. It's an olive branch, one he's hoping his mother will accept. “Please don't tell Tommy, he'll be insufferable.”

She laughs, and if it sounds wet, Simon won't call her on it. “Was he a good shag at least?”

Simon laughs “yeah” he says, after a long while. “It was great.” He pulls away and glances out the window. Joseph is busy trying to balance the football on his forehead, a move he probably had learned from Johnny. Johnny however, was watching Simon through the window, shooting him a look of concern. Simon shoots him a small smile, which Johnny returns with a wide grin.

His mother was right. Simon thinks. He did love Johnny.

Chapter End Notes

I found out that my fiance reads the commetns people leave on my fic, so if youre reading this, Say Hi Mitchell.

Also, if you aren't already, feel free to follow me on twitter [here!](#)

Also pls don't take note of the chapter count, it will most likely go up again

Stoppage Time

Chapter by [skerryB](#)

Chapter Notes

Heads up, this chapter is HEAVY

Content Warnings

Depiction of nightmare/Panic attack

Past mention of Domestic abuse (Including Physical abuse,

Emotional manipulation, coercion, and Control)

Implied (but not explicitly stated) mention of vomiting

See end chapter notes for a chapter Summary

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Johnny wakes up surrounded in a comforting warmth. The heavy weight of Simon's quilts a consistent pressure against his chest, his neck supported by the memory foam pillow Simon had given him. The linen sheets were soft, smooth to the touch; the parts exposed to the air slightly cold, whereas the ones covered by the quilt still retaining his and Simon's body heat.

Johnny stretches out his legs, rolls his feet in circles to loosen the calf muscles. That's as active as he gets. The Sun is only just peeking through the curtain, which means it's still early morning, which means he had at least another half hour to enjoy Simon's company before they have to face the world.

Simon, who's curled in on himself.

Simon, who's rise and fall of his chest is becoming faster and faster as Johnny blinks the sleep out of his eyes.

Simon, who's shaking despite the several blankets covering him.

Simon, who, Johnny realises, had tears tracking down his face, and is letting out gasps in his sleep.

"Simon" Johnny says, gently at first, but more desperately as he doesn't respond "SIMON"

It was like the hotel room all over again, but worse. Last time, Johnny

was startled awake by Simon shouting in his sleep. This, the silent suffering, the choked off but frantic breathing, was all new to Johnny.

Simon's hands moved up to his head Johnny could see the individual tendons in the back of his knuckles, tensed by how tightly Simon was gripping his curls. It had to hurt.

Johnny reaches up to loosen Simon's grip in his hair, being careful to gently extract each finger from the curls and hold them in his own hands in an attempt to give Simon something to grip onto, something to hold and ground him.

"Simon Sweetheart. Please. It's a dream. You have to wake up. It's me. It's Johnny."

Simon's eyes remain shut, but Johnny can see the furrowed brow. He's conscious, to some extent, behind the clenched eyelids and gritted teeth.

"You're safe. We're in your house. In bed. It's Monday morning. We had dinner at your mum's house last night-

Simon jolts awake, and Johnny has to dodge the flailing of limbs. Simon moves, quickly, hitting the floor with a solid *thump* . He moves blindly, shuffling across the floor until his back is against the wall. His knees are to his chest, as if he's trying to make himself as small as possible.

"No! Not mum! DON'T GO NEAR HER!" Simon says. Begs. Pleads. His eyes are open, but Johnny can tell he's not fully comprehending where he is right now, still stuck facing whatever demons came to him in his sleep.

Johnny crouches in front of him, fighting the urge to pull Simon into his arms and hold him there until all he knows is safety.

"It's okay Si. It's me, Johnny. I won't hurt your mum. Can you tell me where you are now?"

"Hotel room."

"No Simon. You're at home" Johnny tries to keep his voice level. Calm. He can feel his heart pulsing against his throat. "I won't hurt you. It's me, Johnny. Can you say that for me? Johnny"

He says it slowly, drawing out every syllable like he's teaching a child

their phonics for the first time.

Simon's mouth moves, but no sound comes out, just the gulping gasps of Simon choking on his own breath. "Okay. change of plans. I'm going to put your hand on my chest, and you're going to breathe with me, okay.?"

He holds Simon by the wrist, gently, and places his hand, open palmed, against Johnny's chest. His hand is clammy, and Johnny can feel the sweat of it pressed against his sternum. "I need you to breathe in for me Simon. Slowly."

He takes a deep breath in, until his chest is expanded and there's no more room in his lungs. "And out " And he lets out his own breath. He goes again, pushing his ribcage to its absolute capacity. This time, Simon takes a slow breath in. It's cut off by him choking, but it's a start.

Johnny doesn't know how much time passes. He can't see the clock, not willing to take his eyes off of Simon and his short sharp breaths as they grow longer, until eventually, he's breathing normally. He's curled in on himself, knees tucked to his torso, with the exception of the hand still firmly planted on Johnny's chest.

The room is silent, save for their steady breathing. It's a sound Johnny is realising he should appreciate more.

After a minute, or maybe an hour, Simon clears his throat.

"I'm sorry". His voice is wrecked, gravely in a way that Johnny, in any other scenario, would find appealing.

"Don't be," Johnny says. "Do you want to talk about it?"

Simon pauses for a long moment, before shaking his head. "No..Not right now...I..Shit Johnny." He drags his palm down his face. He looks old at this moment, like he's aged a decade since Johnny had last seen him, had kissed him goodnight not even eight hours earlier "I'm sorry."

Johnny moves to cup Simon's face in his palms, holding him so that they're making eye contact. Simon's cheeks squish together. "Don't apologise for this. Please"

Simon nods. He pulls his hands close, finally realising that his palm was pressed into Johnny's sternum. The warmth left behind slowly

fades.

“I want to tell you,” Simon says. The words are slightly distorted by Johnny’s grip on his face, but Johnny can’t bear to let him go, not just yet. “I just..Don’t want you to think any less of me.”

“Not possible,” Johnny replies. “You could be the worst person alive and I’d still think the world of ye. I just need you to trust me. Think you can do that one day?”

Simon nods again.

“Good,” Johnny says. He shifts off of his knees and onto the balls of his feet. “Now, I need a coffee, you want a cuppa?”

“I think I need a shower first.” Simon says. He looks down on himself, and Johnny can read the discomfort clear on his face.

“Okay. You do that. I’ll have the tea ready for you”

Simon didn’t deserve this. Didn’t deserve any of the patience Johnny had shown him. Didn’t deserve his calm tone, his gentle words, his warm touch.

He didn’t even deserve this sight in front of him, the sight of Johnny in his kitchen, a mug of tea in his hands.

The ‘You didn’t have to’ gets stuck in his throat as Johnny turns, And Simon is once again greeted by the sight of Johnny’s face. Of the wisps of hair that branch off from Johnny’s bedhead. Of his two-day old stubble and painfully long eyelashes. Christ, even after a morning like this, Simon could appreciate how gorgeous Johnny was.

Simon didn’t deserve this, but he was going to take all he could.

They were both sitting at the kitchen island. Simon’s feet resting on the base of the bar stool, his knee bouncing slightly, Johnny’s hands resting in front of him on the counter. The tea was a little too sweet For Simon’s current tastes, but Johnny had prepared it perfectly. It did its job to wash away the acidic taste of bile in the back of Simon’s throat.

For a moment, neither of them speaks. Simon downs the rest of the tea, then turns to face Johnny.

"I'm going to tell you a lot. Please don't interrupt me unless you want me to stop talking. Can you do that for me?"

Johnny nods, and Simon rests his hands on the counter next to Johnny's.

"I was 19, in the video" Simon starts. "He... He was a PR manager for my team at the time. Held a pretty senior position. When they signed me, he told me I had potential. He told me that I was destined for great things. He told me I was handsome and that I deserved good things. I'd never had that before."

He swallows, looking down at his hands, at the empty mug, at the drawings on his fridge, everywhere aside from Johnny. He couldn't bear to meet his eyes right now. He knew he couldn't handle what he'd find.

"It was ten years ago, I... Dad had just died, and I was in a weird place. I'd grown up with a man that would come home drunk and call me worthless, a waste of space, and that the only thing I was good for was getting in his way when he wanted to knock Mum or Tommy. And then he was gone. And then I had Manuel" He chokes a little, can taste the bile in the back of his throat suddenly resurface. "He told me that my father was wrong, and I got addicted to that."

"Not once did it occur to me that he was lying to get what he wanted. I was so *desperate* for what he gave me that I just started to believe it. Started to believe everything."

Simon pauses. "Mum hated him. Didn't trust him. Told me as much too, but I was too stubborn and angry to listen. She and I had pretty bad arguments about it. I cut her and Tommy off completely for a little bit. He told me that they were just trying to keep us apart, and Mum was married to dad, so what the hell did she know about relationships anyway, and maybe it was a race thing, since he was Mexican. It's stupid, in hindsight, but I was stupid, so it worked on me."

"I was so desperate to keep his approval. I was willing to do anything for it. When he said that the only thing he wanted for his thirtieth birthday was a nice night in a hotel, I agreed. When he asked me if he could take pictures of me while we... I agreed. When he asked me if he could film it, so that he had something for when I was on away games. I agreed. I agreed to everything, because he was so addictive and I was so desperate and stupid and I just..."

Simon feels a weight on his leg. He looks down, and see's Johnny's hand on his upper thigh. The hold is strong, and works to ground him. It has the same effect as his hand pressed against Johnny's chest. It stops him from spiralling. It keeps him in the moment.

"And then I got signed to Manchester. And he told me not to take it, since we'd be separated. But this was my dream. It's what I'd been going for my entire life. I didn't get it, if he really cared about me, he'd be happy for me, right? But then I realised that he didn't care about me. He cared about the idea of me. Of having a little plaything that warmed his bed and was desperate to please."

"I left him. I showed up at mum's in the middle of the night and just... I was so fucking stupid Johnny. I cried in her arms for the first time ever. And she forgave me. I didn't deserve that. Not after everything I said to her, to Tommy." It had been vile. The image of her crying because of him haunted him.

Simon takes a breath. He feels like a weight has been lifted off of his shoulders. His therapist had told him that talking about it might help, but he didn't believe her, not until now.

"He's tried to get my attention every few years. Whenever we're doing well, he tries to get into my head, or weasel his way back in."

He sits in the silence a little bit. He counts the tiles on the kitchen backsplash, the number of freckles on the back of Johnny's arm, visible without moving his head.

"He started messaging me again, after the video came out. And despite everything, I can't get him out of my *fucking* head. He's haunting my fucking dreams, John."

He feels weak at this moment. If it wasn't for this morning, he knows he'd be crying. Instead, he's got nothing left, nothing but the lingering taste of his name on his tongue.

"Can... Can I have another cup?"

Johnny nods, stands, and goes about the routine. Kettle on. Tea bag in mug, Spoon of Honey. The kettle boils. Water in the mug. Stir to dissolve the honey. Mug, with spoon and Tea bag, both brought across to the island. Simon doesn't drink it, just holds it in his hands. The warmth is comforting. Its existence is a holdable sign of Johnny's care for him. A simple act of love.

“I love you” Simon says. “I don’t...I don’t think I’ve told you, But... I really do”

Johnny reaches over to hold Simon’s arm. “You don’t have to tell me. I know, ”he says. His eyes are so blue, and match the shirt he’s wearing perfectly. “I love you too.”

Simon smiles, and brings the mug to his lips. The sweetness is better, and with it it washes the last bitter, phantom tastes of Manuel Roba from his mouth.

Chapter End Notes

Chapter Summary:

Johnny wakes up to Simon having a nightmare and a panic attack. Johnny works Simon through it.

Simon tells Johnny about a past relationship with MR DO NOT ANSWER (Manuel Roba)

As always, you can come hang with me on twitter [here!](#)

(If angst is your thing, I posted a draft last chapters opening that Was Not as fun as it ended up being)

Artefact 2

Chapter by [skerryB](#)

Chapter Summary

Archive Recording. Sheffield V Manchester at Etihad Stadium, Manchester. September 28th, 2019

Chapter Notes

Content Warning: Graphic Description of Injury

Archive Recording. Sheffield V Manchester at Etihad Stadium, Manchester. September 28th, 2019

“Good afternoon ladies and gents. I’m Greg Mansfield, and with me I have Samuel Miller. It’s a beautiful crisp September day in Manchester, perfect weather for some football. And What a GREAT match up we’re in for today”

“That's right Greg. Sheffield Wanderers versus Manchester Soldiers. Now, these teams are always a sight to behold. What can our viewers look forward to today?”

“Well Sam, today, more than any other game, the focus will be on the men in the boxes. At one end, for Sheffield, they have their baby-faced rookie John MacTavish, fresh from the academy team, this man, essentially a boy, has played what? Four, five games in the League.”

“That's right Greg, today will be the sixth time that MacTavish will face Premier strikers. And what a team to face against”

“Yes, you can’t talk about Manchester without talking about the absolutely deadly combination of Kyle Garrick and the newly announced Captain Simon Riley, But I want to focus for a moment on their goalie, Alex Keller. Keller is a solid wall, and he’s normally a wall against them. He works great with his defenders”

“And that facial hair”

“That too, probably the best set of whiskers in the league, takes after his former captain”

“Yes of course, former Captain, Now Coach, John Price. I wonder

what he's been doing to prep his Soldiers to face the fresh face in Sheffield-"

"Great use of alliteration there Sam"

—

"Garrick to Riley. Back to Gaz. Riley shoots and A BEAUTIFUL SAVE FROM MACTAVISH!"

"A wonderful save, that's five attempts now from Riley, and if it was any other man I'd say that the pressure is getting him, but Riley looks as cool and calm as he did before the start of the match."

"Stoic as a statue. Classic Riley."

"And they're ready for another face off. Manchester has the ball. And they lose it immediately, courtesy of a beautiful tackle, perfectly legal, from Sheffield's Connor. And Conner looks to take it all the way. He passes to Hutchison, who gets it past Parra, past Vargas, straight into Aksel's laces. and Keller is there, and OOH that's a big hit from Aksel to Keller."

"The ref is blowing his whistle. Aksel is up, and Vargas is having a strong word with him. Captain Riley is making his way over too. "

"And that's a red card for Aksel, Sheffield will be playing the rest of the game with one less man."

"And a yellow from Vargas. Parra pulling him away before he can make it worse."

"And while this is going on Keller is still down."

"I don't think someone's leg is supposed to bend that way Greg"

"It most certainly isn't Sam. We advise weak stomached viewers to look away right now."

"Oh, He's hurt"

"Strong deduction there Sam."

—

Price runs. Before the whistle is blown, his clipboard tossed aside as he sprints to the goal. Simon beats him there, and is already kneeling next to Alex with a hand on his chest, pushing him back down

"Not a stretcher. I'm not getting a stretcher"

“Alex we can see your bone”

Price looks down, and yep, that's a knee cap at best, or at worst the top of his Tibia, the edge of it pushing past the muscles and tendons to poke at Alex's skin, pushed so tightly its translucent. He swallows, the acidity of his bile burning the back of his throat.

“Son you might not have a choice on this.”

The physio is there now, finally, and is poking and prodding at the knee. They must find something, based on the *scream* he lets out.

“I'm not going out on a stretcher. I can't. The fans, Farah.”

And Oh God, Alex's wife was in the stands. Probably watching the whole thing from the owner's box sitting next to Laswell.

Alex lets out another cry, and Price looks at the physio. “He can't walk. He needs a stretcher”

Alex lets out another sob at that. “No. Please. John. Please. Walk me off.”

It's the first time Alex has called him by his first name, even when they first met, he'd been “Mr Price”.

And now he was John.

“Simon, help me get him up. We'll walk him to the tunnel and then-” he looks at Alex, who's wide eyes are looking back at him, welling with more tears. “You're getting on a stretcher and going straight to an ambulance”

Alex nods.

“Alright. Lift on Three, One Two, Three.”

He and Simon stand, Alex's arms slung over their shoulders. He's putting weight on his good leg, but the other one is useless, Simon taking the brunt of most of the dead weight as the three of them hobble slowly off the pitch.

Around them, the fans applaud. A steady stream of slow claps that builds and builds until the whole stadium is chanting Alex's name. Even the smaller mass of Sheffield's fans are applauding.

Alex's team can do nothing but watch as their friend is carried into the

under tunnel, away from their eyes.

and from the other end of the pitch, Rookie goalie John MacTavish looks on in horror.

Golden Goal

Chapter by [skerryB](#)

Chapter Notes

Hey There

I published this chapter immediately after Chapter 21, So make sure you've read that one before you read this one :)

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Things were going great for Simon,

Sure, he's still copping it from Twitter, and Tommy has been incessant about bringing Johnny round for tea again some time, and most mornings he wakes up shaking and close to throwing up, but the occasional bad morning is outweighed by the sheer amount of good he's experiencing.

He and Johnny are splitting their time at each other's places most evenings, taking turns playing host for the other before tumbling into the sheets together. So far Simon has experienced Johnny's four favourite take outs, as well as several MacTavish family recipes.

Away games still suck though, the hotel rooms and their vague familiarity still made the skin itch and his knees ache. Not even him sneaking into Johnny's room is enough to remove that feeling.

And Johnny, perfect, beautiful Johnny, who is testing every ounce of Simon's restraint, pulling at the threads he's using to hold himself back from kissing him right in the middle of practice, or on the bus, or in the steamed up showers after their game.

Sure, there were bad days, but Johnny made them better. Made him better.

"You with me Si?"

Simon startles, pulled from his thoughts. He's on Johnny's sofa, the Scot tucked up against him. They're watching TV In Johnny's living room, a documentary suggested to them by whatever algorithms Netflix had used to create an image of Johnny and his viewing interests.

Johnny isn't watching the documentary though, too busy looking up at Simon. He looks Confused, if not a little worried, based on the slight furrow in his brow line.

Simon hums in response, and then leans down to kiss Johnny, simply because he can. His lips are soft, and Simon can taste traces of their dinner. Even this was perfect.

On the coffee table in front of them, Simon's phone lights up, but is harshly ignored in favour of Simon deepening his kiss with Johnny, savouring the little gasp Johnny lets out when Simon pulls away, only to immediately dive back in again. Simon has his hands on Johnny's hips, is probably holding him tight enough to leave bruises as he pulls and Johnny, so in sync with him he doesn't even need to break the kiss to ask for what he wants, moves to straddle Simon's hips. The position is awkward, the armrest of the couch digging into Simon's lower back and the throw blanket a bundled mess between them. Simon almost voices his complaints, but then Johnny interrupts him by reaching under his shirt to scrape his blunt nails down Simon's stomach, and Simon can't form a single thought other than 'Johnny'

He tastes like whiskey, like bourbon, like something so inherently *Johnny* that he can't help but pull him closer, pull him deeper.

"We should... Bedroom" Johnny says.

Simon whines in response, before lifting himself, And Johnny, slightly, up so that he can shift further down along the sofa, his head now resting on the arm rest. The position is uncomfortable, but the view it allows, of Johnny above him smiling down at him, is worth dying for.

Johnny lets out a gasp at the movement, of the friction between them. "Or we could stay here" he murmurs. Simon thrusts his hips up again and Johnny throws his head back, letting out a groan. His brow is furrowed, and he's heavenly, an angel above Simon. Johnny leans down to kiss Simon. He trails his mouth along Simon's jaw, and then keeps going. He nips at Simon's jaw, at the crease just below his ear. His lips caress Simon's collarbone, the skin exposed by the collar of his shirt.

Then Johnny is desperately tugging at Simon's shirt, wordlessly begging for its removal. He leans forward, just enough for Johnny to take his shirt up and off.

Johnny leans forward and continues his journey down, he pauses at Simon's chest, takes one of his nipples in his mouth and tugs, and the

pleasure-pain of it makes Simon keen. "Sorry" he says, but when Simon looks down, and can see the smirk Johnny has pressed against his pectoral muscle. He's not even trying to hide it.

"Can I blow you?" Johnny asks. He's looking up at Simon with wide eyes, as if he's begging to take Simon's cock in his mouth. Fuck, He's so gorgeous. Simon's speechless, so he can only nod in response.

Johnny's face lights up, and he surges forwards to plant another kiss to Simon's lips, more biting at his bottom lip than anything else. While he's pulling Simon in with that, his hands slip past the waistband of Simon's sweatpants. He's hard, obviously, and Johnny's touch is so delicate that Simon feels like he's going to shatter.

"Lift your hips for me baby" Johnny says, softly. Simon can't say no to him, not when his thumb is tracing the delicate skin of his head. He pushes forwards, and Johnny shoves the trackpants to his knees. There's not a lot of space, but there's enough room for Johnny to settle, to wrap his arms under Simon's thighs and pull them apart. He looks up at Simon, grin burning and wicked.

"Your dick is so fucking pretty". It's so quiet Simon almost misses it over the sound of his breath. "And you're so hard for me, fuck Si, you're perfect"

Simon can't help but throw his arm over his face. He can feel the flush in his cheeks, knows that if Johnny was to look up, he'd see Simon's face and neck a tinted pink, whatever spare blood in his body rushing to his cheeks. He goes to speak, to say something in response, but is interrupted as his breath was ripped out of his throat in a gasp as Johnny swallowed him to the root. He can feel the back of Johnny's throat.

Johnny moves his hand randomly, before landing on Simon's. He threads their fingers together, squeezing tightly before moving them so that Simon's hand is resting at the base of his scalp. Simon gets the message, and tugs at the slightly overgrown mohawk. Johnny groans in response, the rumbles hitting the base of Simon's cock and shooting up his spine. Their fingers are still entangled together, and Simon couldn't let go if he tried. It's cute, Simon thinks, how desperate Johnny is for contact between them.

Then Johnny starts moving. He raises his head so that the head of Simon's cock, pink and dripping and heavy, sits at his tongue. After a moment, where Simon is driven near mad by the soft, steady breath

against his dick, Johnny hollows his cheeks and swallows Simon back down.

Johnny's pace is near random. He bobs quickly, then pushes himself to have his nose press against Simon's stomach and holds himself there until his throat convulses and Simon tugs him off by his hair.

He can't even warn Johnny he's close; every time he looks down and meets Johnny's gaze, he's left breathless; Johnny is looking up at Simon with a gaze so fucking soft that he can't speak. Instead, he can only let out weak gasps as the coil in his core gets tighter and tighter and tighter.

Johnny pulls off of him, a single line of saliva joining Johnny's lips to his tip. "Simon" Johnny's voice, roughened by the torture he's put his own throat through, sounds like a plea, a promise, a prayer; makes Simon's name sound like something worthy of value.

And Simon lets go with a loud, long groan that bounces off the walls. His hand, still twisted in both Johnny's hand and his hair, tightens. Johnny is looking up at him as he swallows, this throat constricting as his still slightly bobs, forcing Simon to ride through the aftershocks.

Johnny pulls off, and wipes his mouth on the back of his hand before crawling up Simon's body to kiss him. Simon is still catching his breath, and can't help but pant into Johnny's mouth.

"Thanks babe." Johnny says. He's smirking, looking like a cat that got its cream.

After a moment, Simon moves his hand, which had been resting somewhere between Johnny's hip and his ass, to dip below the waistband and take Johnny in his palm and oh-

"Did you cum already?"

Johnny didn't appear to have an ounce of shame on his face, just pure, raw brashness. "I *really* wanted to blow you"

Simon's head thumps against the armrest of the couch. "Fuck Johnny. You're amazing."

—

Price

> Meeting tomorrow after the game. We need to discuss MacTavish.

Simon

> 👍

> will Johnny be there?

Price

> No.

—

@Journnen

Begging Crystal Palace fans to be better than Southampton today pls.

@Mohawktavish

I started supporting Man Sol bc John Mactavish moved to them and If you like looking at pretty football players you should do the same

@JACKALOPED

At the Crystal Palace game and TELL ME WHY theres a bunch of dudes wearing shirts with screenshots The Simon Riley Video?

@JACKALOPED

Replying to @JACKALOPED: Literally theres like nine of them and theyve all got screenshots on the chest like dude?? Theyre acting like its the funniest shit ever but 1) Riley wont see it from this distance and b) youve literally got gay porn on your chest??? Stupid

@jinglyhatclown

Thinking about MacTavish and his slutty little shorts and the slutty little compression leggings I am not normal

@ NotAloneLover

At ManSol vs Crystal Palace and Alex Keller is on the bench? Does this mean he's going to play?

@sapphyrnidae95

Replying to @NotAloneLover: He posted a physio clip on insta yesterday, I don't think he's able to play.

@png_jpeg_

Imagine having a talent pool so deep that ALEX KELLER is a bench warmer.

@CalicoSerenity

Loving the amount of Rainbow Flags at Selhurst Park Stadium right now! Good to see that Football Crystal Palace fans have room for love.

@foxinthefields

Alejandro and Rudy are literally the “Someone will Die..OF FUN” meme but as people.

@_hushimnothere_

ManSol are doing well tonight literally due to the magic of friendship between Alejandro and Rudy.

@Mothbeast_

Simon Riley looks so pissy today. Babydoll who hurt you?

@Shrimpybimp

Does MacTavish use hair gel? And if so does he reapply in the mid time or is it naturally like that?

@Isabeiiiiia

WHAT A SAVE MACTAVISH OMG

@Eddie_tbo87

GOAL FROM SIMON LETS FUCKING GOOOO

@JACKALOPED:

Replying to @JACKALOPED: Update on the dickheads with the shirts, they got approached by security and escorted out LITERALLY WHILE SIMON SCORED THE GOAL

@Cleofied_Lance

If I was a goalie defending against Simon Riley I would simply let him win bc he's babygirl and he deserves it

@sp3ctr3s0und

Any goalie (except MacTavish) with Simon Riley charging at him: Haha, I'm in danger.

—

MR DO NOT ANSWER

> Beautiful Goal today sweetheart

> Did you see me in the stands?

—

Simon is taken back to the last time he was sat in this chair, called into a meeting with Price without MacTavish present, the first time Simon had seen the pictures. They're still ingrained in his memory, the way the man on the camera had sneered down at Johnny while he was on his knees for him.

He thinks about the first meeting about MacTavish, way back when Simon was convinced, he hated the Scot. Like a fucking idiot.

He has no idea what this meeting is about, but when he enters, he's not expecting Laswell to be there too. She very rarely made the trip out for away games. But she'd made this one.

She looks up at him, gives him a quick "Hi Si" before going back to her iPhone, likely answering emails like it's an Olympic sport. Whatever this meeting is about, it's not urgent. If it was life or death, she wouldn't be answering emails, she'd be storming the visitor's facility looking for Price

The door pushes open, and then Simon can hear it thump shut, the lock activating with a soft click that echoes in the otherwise silent room. "Thanks for making it, Simon"

Simon hums in response. It's not like he has much of a choice.

"You said this was about Johnny?" Simon prompts.
Price nods. "It's important. I'm thinking of offering him an extended contract"

"What about Alex?"

Price looks towards the door. It's still locked. He leans forwards. "Alex is announcing his retirement later today"

"Shit" Simon says. "And you want Johnny to be his permanent replacement?"

"Yes" Price answers. His hands are clasped together on the desk, and Simon can't help but stare at them. "I want your thoughts."

Simon feels himself nod. He's thinking. If he was to look at himself, he'd see a furrowed brow and lips in a thin line. "I can't."

"You can't"

"I can't give you my thoughts"

"What do you mean? You and Johnny are solid right? I thought you were over this weird hate thing. Hell Simon, you came out for him. You-" He interrupts himself, before leaning back in his chair. Simon's eyes follow Price's hands, watching them be tucked behind Price's head. "You're fucking"

Simon nods. “For about four months now”

“Right”

Simon plays that sound in a loop in his brain. Is Price angry?
Disappointed?

“I’m sorry” He’s avoiding eye contact again, his own hands sitting loosely in his lap. He feels like he’s being scolded by a headmaster, like when he was a child apologising for breaking a window with a football. His father had beat the shit out of him that night, and his mother had had to pick up an extra shift to cover the cost of replacing the window.

“Are you? Are you sorry?”

Simon considers that. He thinks about Johnny, blissed out and beautiful above him. Thinks about Johnny in the morning, the way his nose scrunches when he first wakes up. The smell of coffee, the touch of warm hands against his skin. The sound of Johnny’s laughter.

“No.”

“It’s not just sex, is it son?” And Price’s voice is soft, almost sympathetic.

“I love him. The admission feels like the first time he played football, a new lightness taking over his chest.

Price nods. “Okay. I can work with that”

—

@ManchesterSoldiersFC

The Manchester Soldiers are sad to announce that, after a long and hard decision process, Alex Keller has decided to step away from the pitch, and retire from Professional Football. The Manchester Soldiers thank Alex for his service, and look forward to seeing the work he does in the Assistant Coach position.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you to everyone that let me use their username for the twit section

As always, you can come hang with me on twitter [here!](#)

Tactical Sub

Chapter by [skerryB](#)

Chapter Notes

For context, this chapter starts A little bit BEFORE the last chapter ends, and gives Johnny's POV immediately following the events

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

When Simon left Price's office, the first thing Johnny notices is that he looks... lighter, as though a physical weight on his shoulders had been removed in the twenty or so minutes Simon had spent in the office.

Johnny had no idea what the meeting had been about. He trusts Simon that if it impacted him, Simon would tell him. Still, he was curious. Curious enough that he stayed behind after the meeting waiting for Simon, rather than just heading home, or to Simon's house. Instead, he delayed his post training routine, spending longer than normal scrubbing the post training dirt and grime from his skin, and then even longer washing, and then inspecting, his boots.

His boots looked like they needed new laces. He wondered what colour would look best. Simon had said his favourite colour was blue, maybe that would contrast nicely with his red boots.

He examined the stitching along the sole, checking for any loose threads, when his light was blocked by a shadow looming over him.

"John, a word?"

John looks up, and meets Price's gaze. His last coach had avoided eye contact at all costs, especially when it had the potential to be a serious conversation. Now however, Johnny can see the warmth in Price's eyes. A surprising comfort that he was starting to enjoy seeing.

"What's up?" He flicks his eyes towards Simon, trying to get a sense of what to expect. Simon's expression, while beautiful, gave nothing away to Johnny. Even Laswell, who was standing at Price's right, was unhelpful, her nose already buried in her phone.

"I know you initially wanted to sign on for the year. Is there any possible chance we can convince you to sign on for longer?"

“You wan’ to extend my contract?”

“Yes. For now, we were thinking three years? Brings you in line with Simon’s”

“What about Keller?”

Laswell speaks up. “He’s retiring. We’re announcing it tonight.”

“What do you say son? Bear in mind if you say no, we will have to start looking for your replacement.”

Johnny thinks it over, for a few seconds. He toys with the lace of his boot, twisting it around his finger until the skin at the tip swells slightly, then he unwinds it. “Three years?”

“Plus the rest of this season.”

Johnny glances back at Simon. Sees that his expression is still schooled into neutrality. “Same pay level?”

“There’s some room to negotiate at the end of this season, depending on performance. And all your other conditions can still be met.” At this point, Price glances towards Simon. “That is, if you still want the hotel room clause in your contract.”

Johnny’s eyes dart toward Simon. “You told them?”

Simon winces. Then nods. “They asked for my opinion. I said I was biased. They asked why.”

“Right,” Johnny says, turning back to Price and Laswell. “Just to clarify, you *aren’t* extending my contract just because Simon and I are together?”

“Of course not Johnny. We would have offered you the contract even if Simon was still convinced he hated your guts and the bones they’re attached to.”

“Simon had no say in the matter?”

Price and Simon both shake their heads, the movement so synchronised that it appears to be robotic. “Simon stuck to the facts. Do you know your goals against average for the past thirteen games?”

Johnny shook his head. He should know, but he hadn’t had a training session in a bit and when he did, the numbers typically flew over his

head

“Zero point three six.” Simon answers. “That's three goals in the last thirteen games. You've had ten games where the opposition didn't score a goal. “

“I've had a good season,” Johnny replies, with a shrug.

“You've had the best season of your career” Price replies. “You're a good fit here.”

“Why does it sound like you're still trying to convince me?”

“Well, you haven't said yes yet”

“Oh.” Johnny responds. As he speaks, he stares directly at Simon. “I'm here for as long as you want me”

—

@ManchesterSoldiersFC

The Manchester Soldiers Leadership team wish to announce that Keeper John MacTavish (@JohnMacTavish33) has signed a three-year contract extension. We look forward to seeing him flourish with us!

@FootballSportDaily

Anyone else read the details of MacTavish's contract and think it's weird that he's not getting paid extra?

@AllenGrahamjourn0

Replying to @FootballSportDaily: They probably can't afford it atm since they had to pay out the rest of Keller's contract, and give him the coaching position salary.

@FootballSportDaily

Replying to @AllenGrahamjourn0: Still, if I was him I'd want something after the showing he's been giving them.

@GHOSTSGAZ

Picturing Sheffield Leadership watching John MacTavish top the stats boards for Goalies like “Fellas I think we fucked up”

@Cleofied_Lance

Replying to @GHOSTSGAZ: Sheffield managers getting ready for work putting on their face paint, rainbow wig and big read nose

@ohwshithereigo1

So I work at a [redacted] and we sell official ManSol shirts and I've had no less than SEVEN openly queer couples come in and each buy Simon Riley jerseys.

@tess_servopoulo

My football hot take is that John MacTavish is a downgrade compared to Alex Keller.

@imsillykitten

Replying to @tess_servopoulo: Bestie???? this has got to be the worst take i've ever seen have you even WATCHED MacTavish play?????

—

"Hey hey everyone. Welcome to another episode of Kickin' It, your guide to all things Premier League. My name is Abs, and with me as always is the lovely Chelsea. Now, Chels, for those who don't have their nose to the grindstone like we do, which is totally fine by the way, people have lives, what are the big headlines in football at the moment?"

"Well, to start, definitely the Manchester Soldiers. literally an hour after we released last week's episode, The Manchester Soldiers announced on twitter that Alex Keller was retiring"

"I swear, Kate Laswell listens to the show and times the announcements just so she can release news at the most inopportune times for us"

"Oh my god yes. thanks Kate."

"Thanks Kate"

"Anyway, Alex Keller is retiring, at least from being a Goalie. It's unfortunate, but not a total surprise, given the length of his injury."

"I mean, the last time he saw the pitch, his knee was sticking out of his leg"

"Actually, I'm pretty sure it was his Tibia"

"Gross."

"Yeah... But. He's not leaving the team, and is getting a promotion to Assistant coach"

"I don't think that's a promotion. The pay is significantly lower"

"You know what I mean. Anyway, he's a coach now"

"Yes. That was last Thursday. Fast forward a few days later Manchester announces that John MacTavish's contract gets extended for THREE YEARS!"

"Yes, and Sidenote, the picture they used for it was really cute, him diving for a penalty save and his tongue sticking out a little bit"

"And the way his shirt rose up a little and showed his tummy? So cute"

"I love John MacTavish. I'm so glad he's on Manchester"

"You're only saying that because now he's in your press region and you can interview him"

"Not True! I also like seeing Sheffield suffer, which is exactly what they're doing right now without him."

"That's right. I went on a date with a guy that was *convinced* that Sheffield would make finals this season"

"What an absolute Bozo"

"So that's the major news in Sheffield, anything else?"

"West Ham have another three players on injury, which means we can reset the clock. Days since West Ham injury now back to zero. How high did it get this time?"

"Four games. reports are saying this is only a sprain though-"

—

Simon watches as Johnny paces in the living room, half chatting, half yelling into his phone with an accent so thick he has little hope of keeping up. He had tried to follow along, but got lost around the time Johnny started discussing the weather and the local neighbourhood gossip.

He feels himself zoning out, distracted by the way Johnny moves around his open living space wearing sweatpants and one of the hoodies that Simon thought he'd lost several weeks ago, his smooth voice filling the room with a warmth that Simon was beginning to realise was entirely Johnny.

Simon can't help but focus on Johnny's face. On his smile. He has a brightness to him that intoxicates Simon. he hasn't shaved this week,

and the bristles of his facial hair seemed to irritate him, based on the amount of times Johnny scratched at his jaw when his mother was speaking.

His sweatpants hang low on his hips, and his ass looks beautiful, the hoodie riding up every time Johnny lists his arm to rub at his face or the back of his neck

“Alright Ma, Tha gaol agam ort cuideachd” and with that he hangs up, turning towards Simon, who has leaned back in his seat to stare, blatantly, at Johnny’s ass.

“Eyes Up Captain” Johnny says, shooting Simon a smirk.

“I love you” Simon says, and Johnny can’t tell if he’s talking to him or his ass. Still, hearing the ease at which Simon said it made Johnny’s stomach swirl.

Johnny looks down at his phone, where his mother has texted him a photo of his sister and his nieces, all wearing their Manchester shirts that they had begged him to send though. He saves the picture, moving it to his ‘to print’ album where it would stay until he made it to the print shop, at which point the physical version would be printed and attached to his fridge.

His fridge, right now, was only half filled with pictures and ticket stubs and drawings. The most recent addition, a sketch of Simon’s profile that he’d done on a hotel notepad, was sharing a magnet with a stick figure version of himself that Simon had drawn in exchange. He’d even signed it, the swirling ‘S’ flowing into the ‘R squiggle’ of his surname.

“I love you too.” Johnny says. “What are your plans for mid-season break?”

Simon shrugs. “Spend time with Jo. Get a pint with the team maybe, or at least the ones that stay in Manchester.”

“Where do the others go normally?”

“Rudy and Alejandro go back to Mexico for a bit. Spend time with their families. Play street football with their old teams. Gaz sees his sister. Roach goes back to America. You’re still going up to Scotland, right?” As he speaks, he slides a steaming mug of coffee towards Johnny.

Johnny nods. “Only for a few days, normally I’d stay longer, but *someone* promised me a date to the Manchester Art Gallery.”

Simon’s head snaps up. “You don’t need to cut your trip short for that. We can go any time.”

‘I know’ Johnny replies. He takes a sip of the coffee, holding it in both hands. “I want to though.”

Simon smiles, though most of it is hidden behind his own mug. “I will warn you now, I don’t know much about art.”

“That’s fine,” John replies. “I’ll make an expert out of you before you know it.”

Johnny drinks the rest of his coffee in silence, enjoying the peace that settles between him and Simon. After a moment, he breaks it. “I want to tell my family about you, when I’m up with them. Is that okay?”

Simon pauses, his mug halfway to his mouth. “You haven’t already?”

Johnny shrugs. “I didn’t want to without your permission.”

“Right.” Simon says. “I don’t mind. I’d love for you to tell them”

Johnny lights up at that, a full beam of joy that Simon wants to bottle and use as bodywash, or maybe a blanket, it washing over him in a cleansing warmth. He puts down his mug, so that both his hands are free to place one hand on Johnny’s hip, the other on his cheek, and pull him in for a kiss. His fingertips brush against the waistband of the sweatpants, right above Johnny’s hipbone.

Johnny pulls away, and Simon lets out an honest to God *whine* that rumbles in his chest.

“We’ve got practice. And you’re going to be late if you keep this up.”

Simon whines again, gives Johnny one last kiss, catching his bottom lip between his teeth playfully before regrettably pulling away. “Be worth it though” he mutters.

“Since when am I the one that cares about being on time” Johnny asks

—

Later, when Simon is dressed and has his keys in hand, Johnny tugs him close for one proper goodbye kiss, as though he isn’t going to see

him in less than an hour at practice. He knows that it's the last chance he will get to be affectionate until they're alone again, and so Johnny savours it, pushing Simon against the door and slotting his knee between Simon's thigh.

"You're a tease," Simon says.

"Yep" Johnny replies, pulling away. "I love you. I'll see you soon." With that, he steps away and pushes Simon towards the door. "Now get out of here before I blow you"

Simon laughs, blows Johnny a kiss, and opens the door. Johnny follows him out, and leans against the door frame, still in his sweatpants and hoodie, and stays there until Simon drives off. Only then does he go inside, checking his phone as he walks up the stairs.

Tommy

> Are you around next week?

John

> I can be

> Simon hasn't mentioned anything though

Tommy

> well I saw you're invited, Simon can huff my farts

Johnny laughs at that, before tossing the phone onto the bed so he can get dressed. He hears it vibrate against the rumpled sheets as he pulls on his training shorts. Once he's dressed, he picks up the phone.

Another text from Tommy

Tommy

> btw Joseph's teacher sent me this yesterday. Thought you'd like to see it.

A second later, a photo comes through. It's a piece of paper. At the top of it in blue pencil is a barely legible 'Joseph R.' The title of the page is much clearer, and reads 'What is your favourite day of the week?' Underneath, it's several lines of handwriting that Johnny has to squint to read.

My favrite day of the week is sunday because me, mum and dad go to Grandmas for dinner. When he can, uncle Simon comes too. Grandma cooks dinner and i help and uncle SI and dad tease each other. Last time, Uncle Si brort Johnny too and he showed me how to play keepie uppie and i showed him the vegetables me and grandma grew.

I hope Johnny comes around again.

Chapter End Notes

I finished this chapter while watching Australia FUCKING CRUSH Canada in the Woman's world cup. (GO MATILDAS!!)
(Literally as I type this we are 4-0 Lets fucking goooooooo)

As always, you can come hang with me on twitter [here!](#)

Also, I don't say it often, but I really appreciate all the comments I get on this fic. They make my day

Shutout

Chapter by [skerryB](#)

Chapter Notes

Thank you to Markie and Cal for reading over this chapter. You both own my entire heart

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

“So Price, what can we expect to see from the team in this game?”

Price leans back in his chair. Simon knows that if he could, he'd have a cigar in his mouth, maybe he'd even take it out to blow smoke in the pundit's face. “Same thing as always, good, quality football.”

The journalists scribble something in their notebooks, before another stands.

“Simon, last time we saw you play at Sheffield, you were unable to score. Are you expecting anything different this time around?”

Simon glances at Price, who does a terrible job at hiding his eye roll. “It's completely different this time. We're coming off a win streak. The team is a united front, and we've got MacTavish in the right net.” There's a low murmur of laughter at that.

“So I take it you disagree with Sheffield's comment they made about MacTavish earlier today?”

Another glance towards Price. This time, the older man only shrugs, So Simon leans forward. “That depends, what did they say?”

The reporter's face lights up, a wide smile that is so smug Simon wants to punch it off of him, and then probably do the same to whatever Sheffield employee the press spoke to. “Max Ashfield said that-” The reporter looks down at his notebook, flipping over a page, “-MacTavish was the most arrogant player he'd ever had the displeasure of working with, and was quote' too entitled to be worth the hassle'. So my question for the both of you is, do you agree with that assessment?”

Simon scoffs at that. He folds his arms over his chest, clenches his hands so tightly that he can feel the joints in his fingers ache and

stiffen.

"I think it's a load of shite, " He replies. He makes an effort to keep his voice steady, but knows there's nothing he can do to soften his expression. "Johnny is one of the best players I've had the pleasure of working with, and that says a lot when you look at the men on this team."

"So you disagree with the claims that he is arrogant?"

"I do, yes. Look at his stats. He deserves to be arrogant. He's earned it. But he isn't. He's just Johnny. He-" Simon cuts himself off, unsure what he can add that won't make the press, and the public, realise how hopelessly in love he is with the Scott.

"I think what Simon is saying, is that we disagree with Sheffield's assessment. To me, it sounds like they are trying to convince their investors that they had a reason behind their poor decision to get rid of MacTavish?" Price adds. He's the picture of ambivalence, fully leaned back, his feet on the table, ankles crossed.

"So you don't know why MacTavish left Sheffield?"

"It wasn't a concern for us, " Price responds. And that's a fucking lie. Simon can recall a time when he *rinsed* Price over signing MacTavish without knowing that crucial piece of information.

"Right. Thank you" and with that, the reporter sits down.

Simon can picture it now, the headlines and comments and photos they're going to use showing his fury. He fucking hates these things. Hates every shithead journalist that wants the scoop for their shitty blog or shitty newspaper or shitty fucking gossip magazine that does nothing but rot brains and waste paper and-

Price elbows Simon, but it essentially does the same thing as grabbing him by the collar and pulling him back down into orbit.

"Sorry" Simon swallows "Can you repeat the question?"

"Of course," It's a short woman speaking now, her hair tied out of her face showing a smattering of freckles and poorly concealed acne. "Next week is Mid-season break, how are you intending on spending it?"

"Oh. I'm uh, I'm excited for a good old sleep in. Might go on a hike.

Spend time with family. Typical stuff.” It’s an easy question for him, and it helps him put a lid on the rage he can still feel simmering just below his skin.

Away locker rooms, Johnny realises, always smell like florals and menthols. The harsh cleaning product mixed with the lighter air freshener to create a concoction that clogged his nose and made him dizzy. Maybe it was a mental thing, done on purpose to psych out the visiting team.

If it was on purpose, it wasn’t working so far. Simon, who came from the press room clearly aggravated by *something*, had managed to channel that anger into a goal and an assist, not even mentioning the four other shots at the net. Sheffield’s former backup, now main goalie, an academy kid that he hadn’t really gotten to know, stood no chance of storming whatever was coursing through Simon’s veins at the moment.

Either way, the smell was unpleasant, but it was made worse by the flowers.

There are roses in Simon’s cubby. A bouquet of red roses, neatly arranged, the thorns professionally removed and petals perfectly spread to show their full bloom. They are a deep crimson, the kind of vibrant red that would hit the green pitch in fat droplets when he took a ball to the face one too many times. The vase they are in, a simple clear one, reveals several inches of water covering the angularly cut stems.

There were roses in Simon’s cubby. Roses Johnny didn’t give him.

Johnny can tell he was glaring at the flowers from his own seat. He feels an elbow to his side, and turns to Gaz’s smirk

“Aw man, you jealous no one bought you flowers?” Gaz teases

“Shut your puss, your mum gives me flowers all the time” he says in response, with more bite that was probably necessary.

He always found it easier to use humour to hide his anger.

Simon wasn’t in the room yet. He’d been pulled into a conversation with one of the officials, and had told the team to go ahead.

When he does enter though, Johnny notices that he immediately seeks him out with his eyes. It was a recent thing he'd noticed Simon doing, but he had a strong sneaking suspicion that he had developed the habit a long time ago. What it did mean though, is that Simon didn't spot the flowers at first, and not until he followed Johnny's hostile glare.

Johnny can tell the exact second Simon spots the roses, already glancing his way and tilting his head. The *From you?* visible on his face even as it goes unspoken. John shakes his head, just a little, and Simon's brow furrows in a concerning confusion.

So Simon didn't know where they came from either.

Johnny moves to approach Simon, but is immediately pulled into a conversation with Alex and the defenders. Something to do with sight lines and being a wall and being ready for rebounds because Sheffield are sniffing them out like sharks smelling blood. In all honesty, Johnny wasn't paying 100% attention, focusing most of it over Alex's shoulder, where he could see Simon approaching the bouquet of flowers.

He watches as Simon picks up the dainty white card attached to the vase, the cardstock looking miniscule in Simon's large hand. A confused look covers Simon's face, a pinched, creased brow, but it's gone in a flash, replaced by an unfamiliar expression that looks ugly on Simon's face and ages him by at least a decade.

"John, you with me?" Alex asks, and Johnny pulls himself back in, nodding along to what Alex is saying. Sheffield likes to favour their corner kicks, Or something like that.

Alex goes to speak again, but is interrupted by the sound of glass hitting the wall and shattering into a thousand pieces, followed by a scream Johnny has never heard before, Low-pitched and terrifying and so full of rage that he'd expect it to come from a wild animal, not his boyfriend. Not Simon.

The room goes silent, save for the heavy panting Johnny can hear from across the room. Then, after a long, awkward silence, the sound of Simon's metal studs hitting linoleum as he runs in the opposite direction

Price shoots him a look, but Johnny is already up and chasing after Simon. Behind him, he can hear Gaz let out a quiet 'holy shit' and the team bursting into noise, Price doing his best to settle them.

Simon couldn't feel his hands, but he knew they were shaking. He'd run down the hall, needing to be out of the room, needing to be away from *him*.

He'd been here, in the locker room. While Simon was out on the pitch, scoring goals and being a nuisance for Sheffield. While he was out there defending Johnny's honour, getting revenge for the sullied comments they made towards Johnny, Roba had been here; Gallivanting around his team's locker room and leaving roses like an anonymous lover.

For just a second, Simon had hoped that they were from Johnny, but Johnny wouldn't have done that, not in front of the team, not just yet. Plus, the anger Johnny held when he saw them was enough to tell Simon that he wasn't behind them.

The whole room had been tainted by Roba, just like himself. It was the overpowering aftershave he used to wear, the bitter smell clinging to Simon's skin and clothes like the teeth of a rabid dog. The overpowering stench that haunted him, long after he'd scrubbed himself of the man.

So he ran. He needed to. He needed to find *somewhere* where Roba hadn't been. Somewhere safe.

He found it. It was a broom closet, cramped and dark, but thankfully unlocked.

Part of his brain, the rational part that was screaming at him right now, told him he had ten minutes until he needed to be on the pitch. That gave him eight minutes to regulate his breathing and stop being *Simon* and start being *Captain Riley*.

So he curled into a ball, rested his head between his knees, and counted the seconds. Somewhere around the one hundred and forty-three mark, the door creaked open slightly, and Simon couldn't help but flinch.

He didn't even need to look up to know it was Johnny.

"Fuck off"

"Simon, I just-"

“FUCK OFF” Simon yells. He needed Johnny to be somewhere else. Needed to protect him from the rot that Roba had already burned through his own body and left him like this.

“Si-”

“Leave. Please.” He takes a breath, the inhale shudders in his throat. “Please. I’ll- I’ll be out in a second” two hundred and ninety-three, to be exact. “Just- Tell Price I’ll be good to go.”

“Okay.”

There's something in his voice, something that fills Simon's mouth with the same bitter taste that the roses had. After another eleven and a half seconds, Johnny speaks again. "I love you." The last sentence is just above a whisper, a harsh reminder that Simon was a secret for Johnny to hide. After a moment, as if Johnny was waiting for a reply, Simon heard Johnny's footsteps disappear.

With two minutes to spare, Simon returns to the locker room. He stops by the medical bay to grab an ice back, which he holds to his face as he walks to the room. He notices, with a glance, that the roses and the shards of glass are gone, someone having swept them away. The room is silent when he enters, and he can sense all eyes are on him.

He says nothing, tossing the ice pack to the side. He can feel the damp condensation against his forehead, and he wipes it away with the back of his palm. His eyes must still be red, but he knows from experience that nothing but time will help with that.

He looks around, almost daring someone to make eye contact, but none of them do. Instead, they divert their gaze, turning instead to Price, who's holding a laser pointer, mid gesture on their game plan. The little red dot circling around three blue round magnets that represent their defenders.

“We’ve been playing aggressive, so they’re going to pull back their defence to counter us. Defenders, I want you to stay back where you can, and be ready to intercept any squirts-” A low snicker is heard from one of the players, which Price refuses to acknowledge “-and stop them from pushing on goal. MacTavish, your job is to stay in the box. We’re up two at the moment, so if you can, try to hold on to the ball for a little bit longer, run the clock down. But don’t be excessive. The last thing we need is anyone getting carded right now.”

At this, Price shoots Simon a pointed look, as if he can sense his thirst for blood. Simon wants to do it, wants to tear Sheffield limb for limb and rip their throats out with their teeth. Wants to hear cracking bones and pitiful begging for Mercy.

But he's not Simon right now, he's Captain Riley.

Captain Riley only nods. Captain Riley calls the team in for a huddle. Captain Riley is the one that shouts "Soldiers on three. ONE TWO THREE! SOLDIERS!" and claps his nearest teammate on the back when they echo the call.

Simon wants to pull Johnny in, beg him for forgiveness, kiss his forehead and tell him that he loves him to. But that, assuming Johnny still wants him, will have to wait, because Captain Riley has a game to play.

He adjusts his arm band, takes a deep breath in, and marches onto the pitch.

—

@Swiet_Tess

Simon Riley is the only player that could score a hat trick and still look like someone pissed in his cereal

@Isabeiia

Everyone talking about @SRiley hattrick but no one mentioning @JohnMacTavish33 getting a clean sheet against his old team. Stay petty bestie.

@Oh_Worm2941

Replying to @Isabeiia: Literally the football version of the Revenge Dress go off king.

@GayestManOtto_

No but fr does anyone know why MacTavish left Sheffield????

@lu_semsal

Someone please tell Gaz that I love him and would die for him

@jacesuntodd

The offside call for Wanderers was bullshit fucking hate refs man

—

The view from his hotel window is stunning in the night light. The

street lights and neon signs of the city centre have an almost magical glow. In the distance, he could even see the apartment complex he lived in when he first moved here, back when he couldn't grow a full beard and had the weight of great expectations on his shoulders.

It hits him, at this moment. That this was the first time he's needed a hotel room for a Sheffield game. Normally, his downtown Castlegate apartment was enough, but not anymore. For almost four years Sheffield had been his home ground.

But now it was just another away game.

He's halfway through sketching the curve of the Millenium Garden's rooftop, the main landmark he can see out his window, when his phone pings from where it's plugged in on the bedside table. He adds one final section of cross hatching, not wanting to lose the light, before putting down his pen and standing to check his phone. In that time, the phone pings several more times.

Simon

- > We need to talk
- > can I come see you
- > it sounds like i'm breaking up with you
- > but thats not it I just want to talk.
- > can I come to your room.

Johnny shoots back a *sure* . The read receipt barely pops up when there's a knock on his door.

The door is open just a crack before Johnny is swarmed by a wall of Simon Riley, the blond man pushing into the room and into Johnny's arms. He kicks the door shut with the back of his heel.

Johnny drops his phone on the floor, choosing instead to wrap his arms around Simon's shaking form. Simon just squeezes tighter in response. It aches a bit, the pressure on his ribs just a touch uncomfortable, but Johnny wouldn't dare tell him to stop, not when Simon so very clearly *needs* this right now.

It's not until Johnny feels a wetness on his neck that he realises that Simon is crying. He pulls away, puts his palms on Simon's cheeks to examine his face. There are silent tears streaking down Simon's cheeks, and his eyes are puffy, as if he'd been crying before deciding to come see Johnny.

As soon as Johnny makes eye contact with him, Simon's face

crumples. His brow pinches together, his frown deepens, and more tears well in his eyes. There's snot drooling from Simon's nose, and his entire face is flushed red.

In any other circumstance, Johnny would find Simon being an ugly crier endearing; But right now, it was heartbreaking.

Simon takes a long sniff, and coughs once to clear his throat. "I'm sorry" he says, before pushing in again to squeeze around Johnny's shoulders. He barely gets the words out before his body is wracked with sobs.

There's so much Johnny wants to say. So many questions he wants to ask. So many reassurances he wants to give. Instead, he says nothing, not until Simon's sobs turn into soft whimpers, then sniffles, before he finally pulls away. He pulls the collar of his sweatshirt up, uses the fabric to wipe his face.

"I'm sorry" Simon says. His voice breaks as he speaks.

Johnny only shrugs in response. "It's fine." He says. He takes both of Simon's hands in his own and squeezes tightly. "Do you want to tell me what happened earlier?"

Simon shakes his head. Then pauses. After a moment, he speaks again.

"I was in a shit mood. The press- They said-"

"I saw." Johnny had seen the comments on twitter after the game. It hurt. Max had been one of Sheffield's better staff members. He had thought that they were on good terms. He was half tempted to text Max to ask him "What the fuck?" but he'd already deleted all of the Sheffield numbers from his phone.

"They shouldn't talk about you like that," Simon mutters.

"It's a part of the game" Johnny says, with a shrug.

"No, it isn't. Not like that"

"Simon" Johnny says. "This is bothering you more than it's bothering me. I appreciate you fighting for my honour, but you really don't need to work yourself up over it" He puts his hands on Simon's cheeks again, forcing the taller man to make eye contact with him. "Okay?"

Simon's shoulders sink, and for a moment Johnny thinks he's said the

wrong thing. But then Simon nods. "Okay."

"That's my guy" Johnny says with a grin, relishing the small smile Simon offers in return. Simon goes to say something, but something over Johnny's shoulder catches his eye. Johnny turns, and sees his sketchbook still open, lit up by the lamp on the singular desk in the room.

"Is that your sketchbook?"

Johnny nods, and moves to get it. Simon moves to follow, but Johnny instead pulls him to sit on the mattress. Simon shifts, moving to sit cross-legged on the bed.

He's not even wearing shoes, Johnny notes. He hadn't put them on before crossing the hall to Johnny's room.

"Fair warning, you're in here a lot" John says, before handing the sketchbook, his soul objectified, to Simon. After a moment of examine the cover, Simon opens it to the first page.

The first page is a sketch of his mother and her cat, Hector. It was tradition at this point, that his mother's old bastard of a cat was on the first page of every book he started. He'd even broken out his coloured pencils to capture the warm rusty tones of his fur and the olive green of his eyes.

"This your mum?" Simon asks, looking at the page. His finger hovers slightly above, tracing over the lines without actually touching them, as if he's worried about smudging the lines of graphite.

'Yep. That's Ma. The cat's name is Hector"

"She looks like you" Simon says, looking up at Johnny. "You have the same nose, and smile."

"I'll tell her you said that. She used to get mad at me because of how much I look like Pa"

Simon chuckles at that, before turning the page. It was a series of quick sketches of his former teammates. Some were looking down at the phones, others had their heads thrown back in sleep. One, A Hungarian player that Johnny called 'Fender', even had a silk eye mask covering his face. He remembers the silky material being an absolute bitch to capture just right.

“You’re really good,” Simon says. He doesn’t linger on this page for too long.

“Thank you,” Johnny replies. He’d heard the compliment before, but there’s a softness when Simon says it that, when combined with his still puffy face, makes it seem more genuine.

They continue like that for a while. Simon turning a page, examining the sketches here, before moving on. Occasionally he would ask Johnny a question, but mostly he sat in unnerving silence, taking in the drawings in front of him.

“Hey, I know him” Simon says after turning the page once more. It’s a small sketch of him, face in a downturned scowl. “When’s this from?”

“Our last game against each other” Johnny answers. “I tried talking to you, but you weren’t having any of it.”

“I remember,” Simon replies. “God, I was a fucking prick”

“Yep” Johnny says, letting the ‘p’ sound pop. “Still thought you were hot though” It’s mostly a lie, Johnny can’t remember, but it works to bring the beautiful blush to Simon’s cheeks and neck; much nicer than the fresh from crying flush

The next few pages are frantic, rushed sketches of a passing landscape, done on Johnny’s train journey from Sheffield to Manchester.

Then it’s a collection of faces that Simon is *very* familiar with. Price. Gaz. Alejandro and Rudy. Laswell. Roach.

Joseph.

The last one makes him pause. It’s a sketch of Joseph and himself. It’s more detailed than the others, and covered in annotations that outline the light source, the shadows, and other little details Johnny thought significant enough to make note of.

“I’m going to paint this one, during the off season” Johnny says. “Once I get a studio space set up. My current apartment is too small.”

“Would it fit in mine?” Simon asks. “I’ve got two spare rooms. Could you use one of those?”

“I could...” Johnny answers “But I’d want it to be near where I live”

“It could be,” Simon whispers.

“Si-”

“No just- I told you to leave earlier, at the game and immediately regretted it. When I was sitting in that closet, I realised that I *wanted* you there, but I didn’t know how. I want to be near you. I want you to wake up next to me. I want to make you coffee in the morning with breakfast and I want to kiss you goodnight every night. I want you to steal all my sweatshirts and my training hoodie because you look so good in my name. I want...” He pauses, catching his breath. “I want everything with you.”

“What are you asking me right now?”

“Move in with me? I’ll get an extra key cut. I’ll help you move. I’ll help set up an art studio, the room with the best lighting. I’ll even watch your trashy reality tv shows with you and pretend to care and not just try to distract you by making out.”

“Okay. When?”

Simon surges forwards to kiss Johnny, the sketchbook abandoned between them. “You’re serious?”

Johnny only nods. It’s all he can do. “I want all of that. With you.” He says.

Simon pulls away to look at Johnny, checks his gaze for any signs of hesitation. He mustn’t find anything, and breaks out into a wide grin, before pulling Johnny in for a tight embrace. “I love you so much.” He whispers “Fucking Christ Johnny, you have no idea the things I’m willing to do for you.”

Chapter End Notes

Fun fact, this chapter is almost twice the length of my regular ones. The only reason its that long is because i wasn't happy with how it ended, but was lazy to re-write the original, So instead I added a scene that was originally going to be in a later chapter.

Love you all (Unless you're following the World Cup and are rooting for a team other than Australia)

As always, you can come hang with me on twitter [here!](#)

End to End

Chapter by [skerryB](#)

Chapter Notes

A little bit of a time skip here, to mid season break

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Doctor Samuel's office was a white room, two armchairs and a long grey couch taking up a majority of the otherwise lacklustre room. It was a great reflection of the therapist who worked there. Simple, no nonsense, what you see is what you get. Her glasses frame her face well, and the notebook on her lap is open. Simon knows that by the end of this session, the collection of notes about their fucked up family will be added to.

"So, Victoria, How about we start with you. Is there anything you want to discuss with Tommy and Simon?"

Beth wasn't present, having not been able to get time off work for today's session, which meant that it was just the three of them in the small office.

"Well" Simon's mother starts. "There is one thing." She's looking at her hands, which are held neatly in her lap. She's nervous, Simon realises. "I think Simon needs to tell Tommy what he told me, about Johnny?"

Dr Samuel scribbles something in her notebook, underlines it, and Simon can feel three sets of eyes on him.

"What? That I love him? Tommy already knows that."

"No, the other thing." She replies. "About the two of you sleeping together."

"YOU SLEPT WITH HIM!?" Tommy's out of his seat. Simon doesn't miss the way their mother flinches at the loud shout and sudden movement. Neither, based on her gaze, does Dr Samuel.

"Okay. Tommy, I understand that this may be a surprise. Can you talk us through how you're feeling right now?" Dr Samuel is calm, and her soothing, steady voice is enough to have Tommy returning to the

couch.

"I'm shocked" Tommy replies. "I thought you'd pine forever. I'm proud of you Si"

"Thanks," Simon mutters. "There's more though"

The room goes silent, except for Dr Samuel's pen as it catches up with the events. "I asked him to move in with me"

Nobody responds. His mum's expression changes, as though she's deep in thought. "It's not too soon, Is it Simon? You've only known him a few months."

"Mum, I've known him for four years."

"You've known *John MacTavish* for four years. You've known Johnny for what, five, six months?"

Dr Samuel cuts in "Victoria, I'm sensing there's a concern here that you're not vocalising. How about you run us through your thought process?"

His mum sighs. "I'm just concerned that you're falling too hard too fast. You did the same thing with-

"Don't" Simon interrupts her. It's breaking one of the rules they've established in these sessions, but he doesn't care. "Johnny isn't Roba."

"I just don't want you to get hurt." she says. "After Ro- After him, you were a mess. I thought I was going to lose you."

"I was a mess for a lot of reasons. Not just him" Simon answers.

"Look. I asked him to move in with me. He said yes. "

"What made you decide to ask him to move in with you?" Dr Samuel asks.

Simon pauses. The silence is long enough that Simon can see Tommy's face crease in concern.

"At our last game. There were flowers in my locker. Roses" Simon admits.

"You asked Johnny to move in with you because he got you flowers?" Tommy asks, incredulous.

“They weren’t from Johnny.” Simon says.

The room is quiet. Even Dr Samuel’s pen is still. “Who were they from?”

“Roba,” Simon says. He has to spit the word out, his tongue burning with its venom.

“Fuck” Tommy says.

“He’s been texting me again,” Simon adds on. “Ever since the video. I’ve been ignoring them, So I’m guessing that he got the flowers to try and get my attention”

“Did either of you know about this” Dr Samuel asks. Both Tommy and Victoria shake their heads and Dr Samuel writes something in her notepad.

“And how did you respond when you found the flowers Simon?” the therapist asks.

“I threw them at a wall and hid in a closet” Simon says.”I just needed to, I don’t know. Not be there. Johnny came to follow me and I told him to fuck off.”

“Can you explain that a little bit more? Why did you tell him to leave?”

“I wanted to protect him, I think.”

“What did you want to protect him from?”

“I don’t know,” Simon says. He looks down, realises he’s been clenching his hands tight enough that his fingernails, though bitten down, are digging into the meaty flesh of his palms. “From me? I was afraid of hurting him.”

“Right,” Dr Samuel nods. “Did you?”

“No,” Simon says. The tension in his hands loosen. “I went to his room afterwards to apologise. And then we talked, and then I asked him to move in with me”

“You acted on impulse,” Victoria says.

“That's not necessarily a bad thing” Dr Samuel responds. “Looking back. Do you regret your choice to ask John to move in with you?”

“No,” Simon says. “I think it’s good for me.”

“Okay. That’s good. It’s good that you’re advocating for yourself right now. Victoria, do you think you can trust Simon’s judgement on this?”

Simon turns his body to look at his mother, who is twisting the ring on her finger. It was one of Simon's grandmother's, one of the very few pieces she had managed to keep safe from her husband's drug desperate raiding. After a moment, she nods, then blinks rapidly, then clears her throat.

“I think so. I’m proud of you Simon.”

—

“Uncle Si?” Joseph says, breaking the still, comfortable silence that has filled the Rileys’ living space. “Can I ask you a question?”

Simon hums in response, not looking up from the crayon drawing he was working on. When the family had returned from their therapy session, Joseph had begged him to join at the dining table, where he was already sitting with a sizable collection of pencils, crayons and markers.

“What is it Jo?”

“Dad said that you and Johnny were boning. What does that mean?”

Simon’s head snaps up to look at Joseph, then over his shoulder, where one Thomas Sean Riley was choking on his coffee, hacking up the bitter liquid, thumping at his chest so he could catch his breath.

“It means that we’re friends” Simon says, after shooting Tommy a glare. The bastard didn’t even have the nerve to feel ashamed.

“Would Johnny bone with me if I asked him to?” Joseph asks, looking up at Simon with wide, hopeful eyes.

God fucking help him. “No,” Simon says. “Johnny can only bone with me.”

“Why?”

“Because-” Simon replies, glancing towards Tommy, who is silently shaking with laughter “Because you can only bone with one person at once and Johnny is taken by me.”

The disappointed ‘Oh’ that Joseph lets out is almost enough to have Simon taking back his words.

“You can still be friends with him though.” Simon offers. “You just can’t bone him”

At that, Joseph perks up. “Will he still be able to play two mans with us in the backyard?”

“Probably” Simon answers.

“Okay” Joseph says, returning his attention to the drawing in front of him, leaving Simon to shoot daggers up at Tommy.

—

Johnny barely makes it through the door, duffle slung over his shoulder, before his legs are attacked by a swarm of children; His nieces and nephews desperate to be the first one to got the esteemed ‘Uncle Johnny hug’

“Auch, let the poor man in first, ye wee rascals!” Bonnie MacTavish yells. She appears in the doorway, a kitchen towel tucked over her shoulder and a paintbrush, long and thin, tucked in her hair.

The children let out a chorus of groans, but thankfully they step away, just enough so that Johnny can approach his mother without stepping on any of their tiny toes.

“Hey Ma” he says, pulling her in for a hug. At this height, her hair brushes against his nostrils, and he is hit with the smell of mineral turpentine. She’d been painting earlier, and probably hadn’t had the chance to wash up when she heard her oldest daughter’s car pull into the gravel driveway.

“Och, ye need to stop growin’. Soon you’ll be ‘monst the trees laddie” She says, taking his jaw in one hand and squeezing the cheeks together. “You been eating well?”

Johnny thinks back to the meal that Simon cooked for them the night before. Salmon, grilled to perfection, served with a brown rice and vegetable blend that Simon had said was a ‘Riley family secret’. “I’m eatin’ good, I pro’mise” John says, the words slightly distorted from his mother’s firm grip on his jaw.

“Good lad” She says. “Now come on. Drop ye’ bag there. I want to

show you one o' my latest pieces, had ya Pa patch it after Joanie put her foot through it on accident. Looks like a proper piece of shite"

John laughs as he's towed through the house, then out the back door, into the glass windowed shed that his parents had converted into an art studio when they'd bought the place, near on forty years ago. The room stank of oil paint and solubles, the cracked door doing little to diffuse the fumes. But it was a familiar smell that Johnny happily breathed in.

"Right," Bonnie Mactavish says, turning towards Johnny. "Start talking Mister"

He freezes. "About what?" he asks.

"*About what* He says" She says, mockingly. "Ye have the nerve to show up at my house using *my handmade scarf* to hide a smatterin' of love bites, and act all coy an' bashful when I say talk" She says, ranting, but with no real mirth behind her words. Her hands are on her hips, and her brow is cocked.

John sighs, and sinks down onto the couch behind him, his knees almost hitting his chest. "Okay. what 'ave I told ye already?"

"Last I 'eard from ye you were pinin' on that tall bastard of a captain of yours" She says, sitting down next to him and folding her legs up so that she could sit without putting too much pressure on her bad knee. "Then I load up my facebook so I can play *words wit' friends* with ye Aunt Isla and I see 'im goin' gammy on some sod-" She interrupts himself to glare at John "John i swear to all that Christ hismelf built if that was ye-"

"It's not," Johnny says, cutting her off. "It was an old video. His shitty ex posted it, or someone. It's a long story. I promise. You raised me better than that ma"

"That I did," She says, puffing her chest out. "So, Ye Captain-"

"Simon," Johnny says. "His name is Simon"

"Right. So Simon and ye, what? fall into bed together?"

"Something like that," Johnny says. He can feel himself blush slightly, and is thankful that his mother doesn't comment on it. "I love him, Ma. I really do."

“And where is he then?” She asks

“In Manchester?”

She frowns, then reaches out and smacks the back of his head.

“Jonathan Duncan MacTavish! You canae tell me that you love this boy and then show up at my house with the only sign of him being the smoriches on ye’ throat.” She says “I wan’ to meet him, make sure he’s good enough for ye”

“I can assure you ma, he’s a good one. A real keeper.”

“Thought ye were the keeper” She says, grinning. “What’s he, Striker? Midfielder? John., please don’t tell me ye got wit’ a *defender* ”

Johnny can’t help but laugh at her. “He’s a striker Ma. A damn good one”

“I’m sure,” she says. She’s smiling at him, her face soft, her eyes roaming across his face. “It’s good to have ye home John.”

John smiles, and pulls his mother into another hug. “It’s good to be home. Now show me this canvas, I want to see Pa’s patch job”

Simon toes his shoes off at the door, drapes his coat on the coat hook, and lets his shoulders sag as he takes in the sight of Johnny’s boots haphazardly piled next to his own, left there where Johnn had thrown them a few days ago after their last practice.

He fels a pang in his chest, just below his pactoral muscle, and it takes him a moment to realise what it’s from. It’s longing. It’s pining. It’s a craving that can’t be filled, instead

He misses Johnny.

He misses the way that Johnny would come up behind him and kiss between his shoulder blades, his palms smoothing down Simon’s chest and dipping into his waistband. He misses the sound of the tv always on, playing a reality tv show that Johnny uses for background movies while he’s cooking or sketching, or doing his evening stretches.

He pulls out his phone, to text Johnny, or maybe to buy a train ticket to Glasgow, he’s not sure yet, when the first notification comes through. It’s a text.

Johnny

> Gonna call you in a sec, don't answer.

Simon has the '???' typed out and ready to send when the screen is filled by Johnny's face. It's a photo he took of Johnny during one of their nights together, when he had 'stolen' Simon's hoodie and promptly fell asleep on the couch wearing it.

His instinct tells him to answer it, like he always does, but instead he thumbs the decline button. A minute or so later, he gets another text, saying that he has one (1) new voice message. He clicks on it.

The speaker is filled with various voices, the *thickest* Scottish accents Simon has heard in the background. Then, blissfully, he hears Johnny's voice. "Hey Si, I know you're at your ma's, but Elsie is on my ass about calling you." Simon barely has time to pick up on Johnny's slightly slurred speech before there's the sound of movement, and a new voice.

"You listen 'ere you feartie bastard. I donae care if you're ten feet tall or Adonis personified or whatever Shite John here calls you, you hurt my brother and i'm cavin' you're feckin skull in, you solid?"

In the distance, he can faintly hear Johnny yelling "It's a voicemail, ye daft bampot, now give me back my phone before I—" The rest of the message is cut off, Simon's voicemail apparently having enough of the arguing MacTavish siblings.

Simon pulls his phone away from his ear to stare at it. As he does, another message comes through.

Johnny

> srry.

> Drinkin wth Elsie. Call yu later

> lobe you

Simon

> I love you too ❤️👉

Johnny

> 🍷💣💕

—

In all honesty, he's not expecting Johnny to call, too busy catching up with family. So when his phone pings on the bedside table just as he's

climbing into bed two hours later, he's surprised.

He's even more surprised when he opens the text. Where he's expecting to find a good night message from Johnny, he instead finds a picture.

It's Johnny, kneeling in front of the full length mirror in what appears to be his childhood bedroom, based on the posters and trophies and general teenage boyishness of it all. In one hand is Johnny's phone, which he's used to cover his face and head. If it wasn't for Simon's intimate knowledge of Johnny's body, he wouldn't know who it was. There's nothing that would lead the picture back to Johnny, even in the background of the image.

Johnny had taken the time to make sure that it was safe for him to take.

In Johnny's other hand, was his own cock. He was hard, So much so that the tip was flushed a dark pink, a small bead of precum evident on the very edge of the slit. In this position, with his knees spread and his hips thrust forward, Johnny looked like a feast. Even his chest, with his perfect nipples hardening in what appeared to be the scottish chill, looked perfect.

Simon wanted to get his mouth on him, wanted to trace every curve and jut with his tongue before swallowing Johnny to the root, until the dark curls of his body hair were pressed against Simon's nose and all he would get was *Johnny*

Johnny

> Like what you see?"

Simon

> very much so

> Please tell me you're sober enough for this

Simon almost drops his phone in his rush to answer the incoming video call request. His screen goes black for a moment before filling with Johnny's face. He looks like he's moved to the bed, his shoulders pressed against a wooden headboard.

"Yeah Si, I havn't drank anything since I called you earlier" Johnny says. His arm is moving, and Simon can see a slight flush traveling up Johnny's neck, making the love bites he left there last night stand out even more. "Fuck sweetheart. I miss you"

"I miss you too" Simon says, his own hand trailing underneath the waistband of his sweatpants. "What's got you so hard?"

Johnny groans, throwing his head back so that it 'thunks' against the headboard behind him. "Elsie wanted to see a picture of you so they googled you. The one that came up was you all sweaty after a game."

"And that was enough to get you all hot and bothered" Simon says, teasing. "You that desperate for me?"

Johnny keens, a high and needy whine that has Simon getting even harder. "Uh huh," he answers.

"Slag" Simon says. "You touching yourself right now, right?" it's obvious that he is, but he wants Johnny to admit it.

Johnny nods, biting his bottom lip.

"Good. Stop" Simon says. "Stop touching yourself."

Johnny whines again, but does as he's told, his hand coming up to brush through his disheveled mohawk

"Good boy" Simon says. "Fuck Johnny, you're so fucking good for me." Simon reaches his spare hand, the one not holding his phone, up to his mouth to lick at his palm, wetting it enough so that the glide against his own cock is smooth.

"Wan' be good for you always" Johnny says.

"And you are," Simon replies. "Sent me a beautiful picture and everything sweetheart. God. I'm going to wreck you when you get home. You have no idea."

He picks up the pace, thumbs at the head to collect the precum there and uses it to smoothen the glide even further, until it's wet enough for him to fuck himself up into his own fist. He grips tighter, imagining that instead of his hand, it's Johnny above him.

"You look so beautiful like this Si. Please. Please let me touch myself" Johnny begs, and he sounds too beautiful for Simon to deny

"Go on then" He says "But don't cum until I tell you to."

Johnny nods, and Simon can see his shoulder shift slightly in Johnny's

rush to get his hand on his probably throbbing prick.

“Gonna fuck your mouth when you get home” Simon says. “Then I’ll take you right up against the front door. You’d like that, wouldn’t you?”

Johnny nods. Lets out a tiny gasp and a “please” that Simon barely hears over his own heartbeat.

“And then the next morning I’ll bend you over the kitchen island while you’re making coffee and fuck my cum back into you. How’s that sound sweetheart?”

Johnny lets out a moan, high and needy. “Simon, Please, let me cum”

“Soon” Simon says. “Wanna hear you beg for it first”

“Fuck Simon. I wanna cum so bad. Wanna cum on your dick. Please, Fuck me”

Simon lets out his own groan, low and rumble as he picks up the pace even more. “That’s it Johnny, I’m close. Come for me baby. You can do it”

Johnny goes silent as he reaches his orgasm, his face tilted back, eyes clenched closed. The sight alone is enough to have Simon dropping his phone as he reaches his own release, stripping his hand and abdomen with cum. After taking a moment to wipe his hand on the bedsheets and catch his breath, Simon picks up his phone.

The Johnny on screen is looking straight at the camera as he licks stray cum off his fingers. “You’re so fucking hot babe” Johnny says. “You have no idea how much I love you”

“I have some idea,” Simon replies. After a moment, where he’s content to watch Johnny suck his own fingers clean, he speaks up. “I talked about you at therapy today”

Johnny pauses, his thumb pressed against his lower lip. “You get that this is a weird conversation to have thirty seconds after phone sex, right?”

Simon nods. “Do you want me to not?”

Johnny shakes his head. “It’s fine. Just pointing out that others might find it odd”

“Well good thing I'm not having phone sex with others” Simon teases.
“Just you”

“And you better keep it that way.” Johnny says. The camera shifts, and when it returns to normal, Johnny is lower in the bed, the soft looking patchwork quilt up to his armpits. “What did you say about me?”

“I talked about you moving in,” Simon says. “Mum was worried about it being too soon, or that I was acting on impulse and hadn't thought it through”

“Oh. Have you thought it through?”

“Johnny,” Simon says, the name sounding like a prayer on his lips. “I've been thinking about you waking up next to me since you kissed me for the first time.”

“Well okay then” Johnny says. “I'm looking forward to setting up the studio, I'll need your help with it though.”

“I'll carry whatever you need me to” Simon offers.

“I know,” Johnny replies. “I will need your help picking out a couch though.”

“Why do you need a couch?” Simon asks.

“So that my pretty boyfriend has somewhere to sit,” Johnny says, smiling.

Simon can picture it. Can picture Johnny working on a piece, a painting or a drawing or even his sketchbook, the light from the massive window casting him in a heavenly glow. He can picture himself spread out on a couch, his phone in his hand, or maybe even one of his mother's novels. Maybe, in the future, there would even be a cat on his lap, or even an old dog. Johnny seemed like the kind of person that would like a pet. Maybe that would have to wait until they retired, when they didn't have to travel for away games, but maybe by then Joseph would be old enough to pet sit for them.

“Si?” Johnny asks, breaking his train of thought.

“I'd like- that” Simon says, cutting himself off with a yawn. “I love you Johnny.”

“I love you too Simon. Get some sleep. I’ll see you in a couple of days, yeah?”

Chapter End Notes

Bonnie MacTavish my beloved.

Also MATILDA VS FRANCE HAD ME SCREAMING. A TWENTY SHOT PENALTY ROUND?

Also thank you to Cal for picking up on a vew of my spelling errors that i missed. Love you bestie!

And finally, if you want to follow me so you can watch me scream on wednesday when the Matilda's go up against France, you can do so [here!](#)

End Notes

I used alot of football terms in this chapter, if you need any explanations let me know :)

As always, you can come hang with me on twitter [here!](#)

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